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The *Analects* of Confucius

Course Guidebook

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Beloit College



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Professor LaFleur teaches the 12-lecture Asia and the Pacific portion of another Great Course, *Great Mythologies of the World*. ■

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FOREWORD

This guidebook has been prepared by talented writers at The Great Courses, and each of its sections summarizes the teachings in the 24 lectures on Confucius and the *Analects*. As you begin your study of the *Analects*, however, I wanted to point out a few of the potential pitfalls that can appear as you begin to learn more about the text—especially if you consult books, articles, and websites in the early phases of your study.

One of the biggest challenges for people new to the *Analects* is the necessity of learning just a little bit of Chinese. It is nearly impossible to study Confucius's thought without becoming familiar with a few key terms. So prominent are about a dozen of them in the text of the *Analects* that it is useful to learn more about how they figured in Chinese thought. Indeed, these lectures cover more than a dozen of the most important ones.

If seeing Chinese terms looks daunting, let me assure you that it is nothing compared to the challenges of reading English translations of those terms. The English language is so rich with possibilities for translation from the original Chinese text that it can lead to confusion for readers just beginning to familiarize themselves with the *Analects*. As a way of introducing this challenge, let me begin with a brief anecdote. When I was preparing these lectures, I assigned the draft manuscripts to the students in my seminar about Confucius and the *Analects* at Beloit College. The majority of those students did not know Chinese—just like many members of The Great Courses audience. Several were so thorough in their work that they read the lecture drafts with websites open and several translations of the *Analects* at their sides.

And then a funny thing happened. They were often perplexed when they looked at the different materials—my lecture, a website, and several other translations. One comment summed up the confusion very nicely. “I can’t understand what is going on. For *li*, I have seen everything from ‘neighborhood’ to ‘ritual,’ and even ‘pattern,’ as well as other English words. I just don’t understand what is going on!”

The first challenge for the newcomer to Chinese texts lies in being confronted by many different meanings for just one sound. For every Chinese sound such as *li* (pronounced “lee”), there are dozens, if not hundreds, of individual Chinese characters in a comprehensive dictionary. Most of those characters don’t create problems, even for specialists, because they are technical terms. The serious challenge for people beginning to study the *Analects* is that there are three or four of those *li* sounds that can create serious confusion. I have tried very hard to make those situations clear in these lectures. In each lecture, when I say a sound in Chinese (such as *li*), I then follow it with the specific Chinese character *and* a translation. In this case, I might say, “Unlike later Chinese thinkers, Confucius emphasized ritual conduct (禮 *li*) more than the ‘patterns’ manifested in things (理 *li*).” Although it looks complicated, it will become clear as the lectures proceed.

So, in our growing list of challenges, let’s call this first one:

.....

[1] One Sound, Many Meanings

Some things that sound the same have different Chinese characters and different meanings. Just a few characters used in the *Analects* with the simple sound of *li* are: 理, 禮, 利, 立, 離, and 力, each with very different meanings.

.....

These many meanings lead to a second and far more serious challenge. You see, those same readers were bewildered by the number of different ways that various translators have used to translate key Chinese terms. The same reader who pointed out his difficulty in facing so many *li* sounds added another comment. “I can’t understand how there can be half a dozen or more ways to say 孝 *xiao*. Can’t they just decide on one way and leave it at that? Why do all of those different translators have to confuse us?”

Before we proceed to an explanation, let’s add this second challenge to our list:

.....

[2] Many Translations

Some specific Chinese characters have many possible English translations. As an example, 孝 *xiao* can easily be rendered “filial piety,” “family reverence,” and “filial conduct,” just to name a few.

.....

In order to explain, let's take a look at two of the most important concepts in Confucius's *Analects*. Indeed, I devote the better part of two lectures to each concept, and I try to lead listeners to develop a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding them.

The first concept is 孝 *xiao* (pronounced “shh + yow”). Think of its core meaning as a child being devoted to parents. Children who are *xiao* are obedient and deferential—but they know how to remind their parents when they do something wrong (like throwing recycling into the trash bin or driving too fast on city streets). An old but very useful term that figures in most translations, even today, is the English word “filial.” I sometimes use this translation in these lectures, too. The problem is that “filial” or “filiality” alone doesn't provide the translator (or lecturer) with the breadth of variation for showing the range of meaning Confucius seems to present through his teachings. For that reason, the earliest translators almost all translated 孝 *xiao* as “filial piety.”

“Piety” sounds a little Victorian, doesn't it? Furthermore, the word “piety” speaks to the very religious focus of many early translators, many of whom were missionaries of one kind or another. Beyond the 19th- or even 18th-century tone of the word “piety,” there is another problem that I stress in my own teaching (and you will hear often in these lectures). Piety is a very individualistic word; it usually focuses its power on a single person's devotion. It doesn't begin to approach what I (and many others in China and beyond) see in the social and relational qualities of the term *xiao* as used by Confucius and his followers in the *Analects*. So here is a small sample of some of the ways that *xiao* has been translated. Let's think of it as a significant, but limited, semantic field.

Filial Piety
Family Reverence
Filial Conduct/Filial Devotion/Filial Obligation

I have chosen to translate 孝 *xiao* with the terms in the last line, believing that they help to tease out more of the social idea embedded in the concept than those in the first or second lines. I do find “family reverence” to be a beautiful translation. To my mind, though, the term 孝 *xiao* eventually takes on meanings in the *Analects* that are so far beyond the realm of the family that I prefer to call it “filial conduct” (or sometimes “filial devotion,” and occasionally even “filial obligation”).

Now consider a related problem. Some Chinese characters really would be better left untranslated, because no English word or phrase really approaches the Chinese meaning very closely. Indeed, using an English word creates special interpretive problems. Let’s add the difficulty of translation to our growing list.

.....
[3] Translation Difficulty

Some terms are almost untranslatable, and any translation serves merely as a placeholder for deeper meanings that must be grasped through study. The most significant of these is 天 *tian*, which is commonly translated as “heaven” (including in these lectures). It is a very different kind of “heaven” than many Westerners imagine, however.

.....

The word 天 *tian* (it sounds like a combination of “tea” and “yen”) has given Western translators (and teachers of Chinese language and culture) fits over the generations. The most common translation is “heaven,” and I have somewhat reluctantly chosen to use that term in these lectures.

The only real alternative to using the English word “heaven” is simply to render it *tian*, requiring that the listener learn the Chinese term and add it to

our knowledge of Chinese culture. In fact, that is what many of us do in our classes, but there we have the advantage of being able to prod, cajole, harp, and occasionally pester students until they grasp 天 *tian*'s ineffable qualities over the course of a semester. But even a thorough 24-lecture series on the *Analects* does not afford enough time easily to work without translations.

Be aware of this key point, though. The “heaven” referred to in the *Analects* is what we often call a placeholder concept. It is a far cry from any kind of Judeo-Christian concept of heaven that can be imagined. It is not a land of milk and honey, nor a place where a theistic figure resides. It isn't really even a place at all. It is a bit like a vague, conceptual corporate board of ancestors and former kings that exerts a moral force upon earthly activities. For now, however, just think of “heaven” as a placeholder for something that you will learn more about as you listen and read.

While 孝 *xiao* and 天 *tian* seem complicated, no single concept is more central to Confucius's *Analects* than 仁 *ren* (sounds like “wren”). Much more difficult to define (in any language) than 孝 *xiao*, the semantic field surrounding 仁 *ren* is enormously complex. As a way of thinking about it, just imagine people acting to the very best of their abilities in the whirlwind of social, ethical, and moral situations. Here is a rendering of the semantic field from just a few sets of translations.

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Humanity | Humaneness |
| Benevolence | |
| Man-Being-At-His-Best | |
| Authoritative Conduct | Consummate Conduct |

Open any translation of the *Analects* and you will see these translations and perhaps a few others. The top lines have the oldest history, with generations of translators who were looking for a Biblical connection to early Chinese texts. “Humanity,” but especially “benevolence,” are accurate renderings of part of the meaning of 仁 *ren*. Yet those translations are far more individualistic for many of us who perceive a much broader social and relational teaching in Confucius's *Analects*. For the same reason, the somewhat prolix “man-being-

at-his-best” tends toward a character-driven, individual quality. 仁 *ren* is much more than that, though.

A recent translator tried the term “authoritative conduct.” It is a very good rendering that helps readers to grasp the way that the person with 仁 *ren* is in command of complex ethical and social situations. The problem that most readers could not surmount was the array of rather negative English language associations with the word “authoritative.” Those negative associations rendered the intent of the translators ineffective—too many Western readers heard strains of “authoritarian,” even though that was not at all the message of the translators. So let’s add another item to our list.

.....

[4] Problematic Associations

Some very useful English words carry secondary meanings that make their use in translation especially problematic.

One example is a phrase used to translate 仁 *ren*:

“authoritative conduct.” Many Westerners can’t help but hear “authoritarian,” or other strains they regard as negative, even though the word need not be interpreted in that manner.

.....

One of the translators who used “authoritative conduct” in a very fine translation of the *Analects* has reconsidered recently. In a subsequent book, he has translated 仁 *ren* as “consummate conduct.” The translation “consummate conduct” gives a very good sense of the flowing, confident-yet-humble sense of the term, and I have used it in my own translations for these lectures. Nevertheless, I continue to try to find terms and phrases that might tease out even more of the social and relational qualities of 仁 *ren*. For me, the term really conveys a kind of social, moral, and ethical virtuosity. My lectures explain this idea in detail. It is like a violinist with exquisite skills, but those skills only show their full array of wonder when in concert with others. 仁 *ren* is a virtuoso command of complex situations, played to sincere perfection. And why didn’t I then choose to translate 仁 *ren* as “social-moral-ethical virtuosity”

in these lectures? Well, that leads to our fifth and final point on the list. The most accurate English rendering is often far too cumbersome—far too many words—for a translation that seeks to give a sense of the beautifully spare, even laconic, quality of the *Analects*.

.....

[5] *Accurate but Clumsy*

Sometimes the most accurate translation (one that gives a rich, full sense of the terms used in the *Analects*) is so cumbersome that it masks an equally important aspect of the text—its beautifully laconic quality. While I think that 仁 *ren* can best be rendered as “social-ethical-moral virtuosity,” repeated use of it (as required in the *Analects*) creates a needlessly clumsy feel that—accurate or not—detracts from a beautifully efficient text.

.....

Translation is about choice, but it is also about audience. I have prepared my translations in these lectures to meet the needs of ambitious people who are just beginning their study of Confucius and the famous book associated with him. I have paid careful attention to the list we have just considered when translating and explaining the *Analects*. The lectures have been designed to help you grow in both your own knowledge of the text and as an interpreter of the complex puzzles that confront everyone who learns about another language and culture.

The social and relational dynamics that I (and many others) see in Confucius's *Analects* have guided my own interpretations, and I seek to teach listeners how to think in that manner—in a way much closer to the actual text of the *Analects* than the character-driven and individualistic translations of earlier eras. In my own translations for this course, I have (whenever possible) translated appropriate passages in the plural. Using the plural helps to avoid

an individualistic focus that is muted in Confucius's *Analects* in favor of a social-relational theme. Consider the following passage.

.....

4.3

Individualistic Translation

The Master said, “The person exhibiting consummate conduct (仁 *ren*) is the only one capable of liking a good person and disliking a bad person.”

4.3

Social-Relational Translation

The Master said, “People exhibiting consummate conduct (仁 *ren*) are the only ones capable of liking good people and disliking bad ones.”

.....

The difference may seem minor in just one brief translation, but imagine how the understanding of the text is influenced when translators have consistently used the singular and individual focus to convey Confucius's meaning. I believe that it distorts it—and quite starkly—as one individualistic interpretation is piled upon another.

Of course, when a passage clearly does speak of the individual, it is necessary to translate that accurately, too. Still, one of the most significant lessons you will draw from these lectures is that we should not assume without reflection that Confucius is speaking of a single person in many of his statements. I far prefer to err on the side of assuming the rich background of human beings engaged in activities together, and I think that you will see, as you learn more about the *Analects*, that developing a social-relational perspective will be useful.

So let's take a look at the list one more time, with all five items together. They serve as a good reminder of how to approach the early stages of your learning about Confucius's *Analects*.

.....

[1] *One Sound, Many Meanings*

Some things that sound the same have different Chinese characters and different meanings. Just a few characters used in the *Analects* with the simple sound of *li* are: 理, 禮, 利, 立, 離, and 力, each with very different meanings.

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virtuosity,” repeated use of it (as required in the *Analects*)
creates a needlessly clumsy feel that—accurate or not—
detracts from a beautifully efficient text.



One final note is necessary. Think back to the three examples I have used in this foreword. For decades, and really much more than a century, “filial piety,” “heaven,” and “benevolence” have been used to translate 孝 *xiao*, 天 *tian*, and 仁 *ren*. So why shouldn’t we channel that continuity and use it to create a path to understanding through consistency, instead of introducing a wide array of new terms? Continuity matters, and I value it. But not now, and not with the world’s most recognized Chinese thinker and book entering a new era in global understanding.

No, if there ever was a time for a useful kind of translational chaos, it is surely now. There may be a centuries-old tradition of translations such as “filial piety” and “benevolence,” but those who read them amount to just a tiny fraction of the exploding audience for Confucius’s thought in the 21st century. From my perspective, now is precisely the right time for teachers and scholars to work through the interpretive challenges of Confucius’s *Analects*, and to develop an approach and a vocabulary that gets to the heart of this great book’s

deep message about how to live one's life in a community and world that is connected in ways we can't always easily comprehend.

There is dipping your toes into the water, and then there is jumping straight into the pool. I prefer the latter, and I think you will, too. Instead of doling out information, these lectures aim to teach you how to think about Confucius's *Analects*, and that is a far more useful lesson than merely memorizing a stream of translations that have been used for a very long time.

I urge you not to start exploring full translations of the *Analects* until you have completed these 24 lectures. After you have, though, such reading will be invaluable, should you choose to pursue it. While you are still beginning to grasp the key concepts, though, the profusion of different full-text translations can limit rather than expand understanding.

As an alternative, I have included on my blog, *Round and Square*, several passages from the *Analects* that show a wide range of different translations for passages that we will discuss in these lectures. Even early on in your listening, it might be useful to browse through several of them, so that you can see both the extraordinary agreement in many cases about what a passage means and the often bewildering array of different translations for key terms. I will have much more to say about these matters in the guidebook's afterword, which will describe possible paths to take after completing the lectures, including reading several full translations at a time, as I require in the classes that I teach. With the foundation of these lectures to support you, such reading will eventually lead to even deeper understanding of a very great book.

Robert André LaFleur

A NOTE ON CHINESE CHARACTERS AND KEY TERMS IN THE *ANALECTS*

1. A Brief Guide to Chinese [Mandarin] Pronunciation

Chinese characters can be pronounced in various dialects, the two most prominent today being Cantonese and Mandarin. There are many more, though, and each region has a wide array of dialects and sub-dialects spoken at home, in shops, and in any situation where language can be localized (much as regional phrases and pronunciations work in the United States). Mandarin is a standardized dialect that is taught in schools in China, Taiwan, Singapore, and beyond. It is used consistently on television, as well. The Chinese names and terms in this lecture series are all pronounced in Mandarin.

As I have noted, many Chinese throughout the world speak a local dialect at home and Mandarin only in more public contexts, providing the richness of regional variation for something best illustrated by the early saying (I paraphrase here) “Walk even three miles, and speech begins to get fuzzy; walk twenty miles and it is hard to understand anything being said.” I am reminded of something I learned in my ethnographic fieldwork on the southern sacred mountain in Hunan Province. People make a clear distinction between “front mountain” (前山) and “back mountain” (後山). I am routinely told, on both front and back, that it is difficult to understand people from the other side—they live just 10 miles apart—unless they speak the shared dialect of Mandarin.

Unlike a language such as Japanese, which can have half a dozen or more ways to pronounce a written character, Mandarin usually has one way to pronounce it. There are numerous exceptions, but one of the central features of Chinese language study is that the student must learn, for the vast majority

of characters, just one pronunciation. In other words, in Mandarin, *ren* 仁 is always pronounced something like “wren,” but remember this idea: one character, one syllable. Today’s language has a single syllable for every character in the language. For example, the character 喜, meaning something close to “happiness,” is pronounced relatively closely to “she.”

From that foundation, English speakers who seek to translate Chinese characters must find a way to transliterate the character’s pronunciation. For people who don’t read Chinese the matter is very complicated, indeed. The process of transliteration is often referred to as Romanization (it is almost always capitalized). It refers to the result of rendering a Chinese character (as in the example above) into something resembling an alphabetic form.

The two most commonly used transliteration (Romanization) systems used in the West today are Pinyin and Wade-Giles. The italicized letters below are transliterations of the character 喜 using these two systems.

xi Pinyin: Used by most scholars and almost all current newspapers and journals.

hsi Wade-Giles: Used by most scholars (and other publications) until the mid-1970s. It is still used by many scholars, especially those who have grown used to using it when it was standard.

There are other systems, too, but Pinyin and Wade-Giles dominate most publications. Pinyin has taken root in much of the world, and it is used in these lectures. But Pinyin’s use of the initial consonants *z*, *q*, and *x* can be confusing, especially for English readers. It gets even worse when one reads, say, a translation of the *Analects* published in the 1970s and another published more recently. The former will likely contain terms in Wade-Giles Romanization, and the latter probably will have Pinyin. Suddenly, the term you have grown comfortable thinking of as *xi* is written *hsi* (or vice versa).

Readers must (as I like to think of it) take a deep breath and remember that both words refer to just one Chinese character. It is seemingly simple, at

least until you open another book and see first 喜 *xi* and then 喜 *hsi*. It can be disastrously confusing when what I have been transliterating in Pinyin as 仁 *ren* comes out as 仁 *jen* in another book. Both are perfectly accurate, but they present confusing challenges for readers just beginning their studies of the *Analects* or Chinese history. The situation can become even more confusing if one listens to a set of lectures such as these (using Pinyin) and, perhaps, checks a translation from the library that happens to use Wade-Giles Romanization.

In those cases, the very same person's name might appear to be spelled in two different ways. I often joke to my colleagues in American and European history that they have it easy—students have to learn “Washington,” “Adams,” and even “Charlemagne” only once (even as badly as they might pronounce the latter). In Chinese studies, the situation is far grimmer. One of my colleagues tells the story of a student paper he once received. It compared the thought of “two” Chinese philosophers: Xunzi and Hsün-tzu. The student argued that their philosophies were quite similar, but that they differed in certain respects—the language seemed to be subtly different. The problem is that “Xunzi” and “Hsün-tzu” refer to exactly the same person. The Chinese characters behind those “two” names are simply 荀子.

Although the story comes across initially as humorous, I actually find it to be quite sad. It is difficult enough to learn philosophical, historical, and literary concepts in any language. To add a chaos of words to that challenge worries me. So, in order to help your studies, I am adding here a partial chart meant to introduce some of the pronunciation tools for the terms you will encounter. For our purposes, though, the most important thing to internalize is that just because you see *ren* in these lectures and *jen* in a book that you checked out of the library, that doesn't mean that they are two different words.

Pinyin Initials

q = cheer

x = ship

z = reads

c = that's

zh = large

Pinyin Finals

o = saw

e = French "le"

i = machine

u = rude

ü = German ü

ai = I

Pinyin-Wade Giles

x = hs (xing = hsing)

q = ch' (qing = ch'ing)

z = ts (za = tsa)

zh = ch (zhun = chun)

ch = ch' (chan = ch'an)

j = ch (jing = ching)

r = j (ren = jen)

2. Writing the Characters

If you want to learn how to write the key terms in the *Analects* in Chinese, you will have to learn the basics of the writing process. Learning to write some of the key concepts in the *Analects* can be a useful tool if you wish to deepen your understanding. Please note that only sustained study of the Chinese language with experienced teachers can give you a thorough grounding in Chinese studies. My advice here is simply for those who wish to write out characters such as 孝 *xiao*, 天 *tian*, 仁 *ren*, and 禮 *li* as they seek to understand how the text works. For this purpose, I strongly recommend William McNaughton's *Reading and Writing Chinese*. It is imperative that you get the traditional character edition if you want to learn the fundamentals of Chinese writing.

Chinese characters do have a simplified form that is used today in the People's Republic of China. A brief way to explain a complicated situation is that it is much easier for beginners to move from traditional to simplified characters than vice versa. McNaughton's traditional character edition will teach the fundamentals of the Chinese writing system. I ask my own students every semester to write out the first 1,000 characters from McNaughton's text during the course of their Chinese historical and cultural studies (about 60 characters a week). I collect their notebooks regularly and comment on their progress. I urge them to treat the book like a drawing course, and to follow

its stroke-order charts carefully. The results are remarkable. In a few weeks, students who previously had never attempted to write Chinese begin to understand the internal logic of the Chinese writing system. Chinese characters are not chicken scratchings, and McNaughton's book shows how and why. I must add that I implore my students not to try to memorize the characters at this point. Those who attempt to do so just slow down the internalization-of-principles process and actually inhibit their progress. Memorization is for language study. The purpose of internalizing the principles of writing is what we seek here.

This is the way to get started, but only a good language teacher can help you from there.

BOOKS THAT MATTER: THE *ANALECTS* OF CONFUCIUS

SCOPE

Born in the mid-6th century B.C.E., Confucius led a life that would only appear to be monumental in the centuries after his death. Although he struggled to find even a relatively minor position in the courts of his time, his influence on later generations was truly extraordinary. Unable to find administrative employment, Confucius taught. Many of the lessons he imparted to his followers were remembered and written down in the decades after his death. Although Confucius did not write the *Analects*, many of the approximately 500 entries in the text employ his voice. Together, the entries in the *Analects* create a comprehensive approach to living in a complex social world. The lessons are as resonant today as they were 2,500 years ago.

The course begins by introducing Confucius, the *Analects*, and the reasons why his lessons matter, even in a modern world that Confucius would not recognize. You will then consider a series of thematic and historical topics that will help you understand how to read the *Analects*. Afterward, you will focus on a number of important passages in the text. Along the way, you will meet several of Confucius's most dedicated followers, including Zai Wo, who is something of a trickster figure in the world of the *Analects*; Yan Hui, Confucius's favorite student; Zilu, an ambitious and energetic student who more than occasionally worried Confucius with his headstrong approach; and Zigong, a truly devoted follower who was able to ask Confucius questions that often resulted in new articulations of his teachings. You will then examine certain themes in the *Analects* regarding the worlds of government and social living that lie at the very heart of Confucius's teachings.

After this thorough introduction to the *Analects*, you will focus on the key conceptual elements in the text. You will begin with fundamentals, and nothing is more fundamental to the teachings of the *Analects* than the concept and

practice of filial conduct. You will then move on to a concept that is allied to filial conduct: the principle of remonstrance. You will also consider several other concepts that Confucius maintained lay at the heart of being an exemplary person—the kind of person whose influence radiates outward to make everyone better. These concepts include exerting all of one's effort, sincerity, being true to one's word, and virtue or excellence, and they are brought to completion in empathy or reciprocity. You will see that all of these skills, when put together and honed in the practice of social life, prepare a person for the highest levels of conduct. You will also learn about consummate conduct and ritual conduct, skills that are so advanced and so nuanced that they require mastery of all that has come before. You will conclude this section by learning how all of these skills come together in the practice of managing oneself, managing one's family, and managing (as the saying in China goes) all under heaven.

By the time you reach the final section of the course, you will be ready for a fascinating story about Confucius's legacy and the ways in which the *Analects* helped to shape Chinese government, society, and history up to the present day. Confucius has made an extraordinary comeback in the last few decades. In this final section, you will see how and why Confucius and the *Analects* are still relevant in and beyond China to this day. ■

Lecture 1

THE HIDDEN TEACHING DYNAMIC OF THE *ANALECTS*

Almost everyone has heard of Confucius, and yet relatively few people in the West know much about him or why the one little book attributed to him—he didn't write a word of it, actually—has changed the world. At times ambiguous, contradictory, and even maddening, the *Analects* of Confucius is also filled with priceless wisdom and is deeply rewarding to explore. This course will endeavor to make sense of this provocative text that has shaped China and vast territories beyond it for millennia.

THE LIFE OF CONFUCIUS

- ◆ The man known in the West as Confucius is called Kongfuzi or Kongzi in China. He was a philosopher, teacher, civil servant, and political advisor of sorts who was apparently born around 551 B.C.E., perhaps in Qufu, in the state of Lu. Lu is now part of China's peninsular province of Shandong, which is located in the country's northeast and extends into the Yellow Sea.
- ◆ We have many pieces of information about Confucius's life, but almost nothing is known with certainty. The sources of information that we have about Confucius are unreliable and contradictory, and they seem to be a blend of fact and hagiography. We can say with confidence, however, that by a century or so after his death, Confucius was revered in China as a great thinker and educator.

- ◆ It appears that Confucius lived in poverty for a period of his childhood. He developed a reverence for knowledge and self-improvement, both for its own sake and as a way of improving society, which was in a state of instability in his time.
- ◆ Confucius evidently became a teacher. He most likely began tutoring pupils individually or in small numbers, as was common in his day. Confucius appears to have later attained a government post in his home state of Lu. At a certain point, however, he went into exile, perhaps when the Duke he served lost political power.
- ◆ He traveled for some years, seeking positions as a political advisor to leaders of neighboring states but never finding a job that lasted for any great length of time. During those travels, Confucius was accompanied by a small band of loyal disciples who continued to learn from him.
- ◆ Ultimately, Confucius returned to Lu, where he established an academy and taught for the remainder of his life—a period of just five years, if the sources can be believed.
- ◆ The best source for information about Confucius and his ideas is the *Analects* itself. But it presents many challenges for the historian, not to mention the average reader—in part because Confucius didn't write it.
- ◆ The *Analects* is a collection of ideas attributed to Confucius, compiled by his students, students of his students, and/or people even more tenuously connected to him. It didn't take its present, rather perplexing shape until a few centuries after his death, and recent discoveries continue to shed new light on its meaning.
- ◆ For all the uncertainties surrounding it, the *Analects* has been so deeply revered over the centuries that it is no exaggeration to say that it is a cornerstone of East Asian civilization. Its influence is alive in modern China and beyond to this day.



Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.)

THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ One way to look at the *Analects* is as a set of instructions, gentle corrections, and stern admonitions for “students” who wish to become better people. But viewed more broadly, it can be seen as a set of guiding principles for a meaningful and ethical life and for maintaining a just and peaceful society.
- ◆ The *Analects* is a collection of brief passages that capture Confucius’s teachings, either in the form of direct statements by Confucius, statements he made in conversation with others, or statements by other people, such as Confucius’s students. Some statements seem to relate to one another, but others at least appear to be in no particular order. This can be confusing for a first-time reader.
- ◆ Although the text threatens to burst into a sea of details, linked by nothing but the verbal borders of the chapters themselves, the *Analects* is held together by something quite profound. We will refer to it in this course as Confucius’s “teaching dynamic.” There is a pedagogical imperative at work in the *Analects*.
- ◆ The *Analects* is fundamentally performative in that they were meant to be chanted. In China, there is a term (*bei*) used for memorizing and reciting out loud. Many educational texts were meant to be “talked,” and the *Analects* seems to have been assembled in keeping with that tradition. Little children began their studies with primer texts that helped them learn the rhythmic cadences of classical Chinese. In time, they began a process of memorization that had many variants, but one solid goal: to be able to recite, sometimes backward and forward, the key texts of the classical tradition. Confucius’s *Analects* became one of those texts, and in most education programs for 2,000 years, it towered over all the others.
- ◆ The *Analects* is performative in another significant sense. There is a kind of drama involved in the way that the text unfolds—the way that a problem is opened up, examined, and then left until “the next time.” And there always is a “next time,” all of the way to the end of the book.

CONFUCIUS'S MODEL SOCIETY

- ◆ The ideas in the *Analects* are not those of an ascetic who separated himself from society in a quest for truth or enlightenment. On the contrary, they represent the concerns of a man who was deeply troubled about the state of his society and wanted above all to improve it.
- ◆ Confucius lived during the Eastern Zhou dynasty, at the close of what is called the Spring and Autumn Period. China's imperial structure was in a weakened state, and warfare had been ongoing for many years among its constituent feudal states. But China was on the verge of even greater conflict: the Warring States period, when larger states would field larger armies and social order in many quarters would break down.
- ◆ Confucius saw the signs of what was coming all around him. Sons killed fathers, and ministers of government killed rulers. Even when the disorder did not lead to murder, Confucius bemoaned the lack of respect shown at all levels of society. Large families had started to arrogate to themselves the trappings of kingly rule—to appropriate the rituals of the Zhou dynasty court itself. For Confucius, this appropriation was deplorable, evidence that society's fabric was coming apart.
- ◆ In striving to foster a harmonious society, Confucius had a model in mind. It was that of the early Zhou court, some 500 years before his time, and it centered around a figure called the Duke of Zhou.
- ◆ The Duke of Zhou plays an iconic role in the early, often hazy, mythical history of China. The story goes that his brother, the victorious King Wu, had subdued a stagnant and corrupt Shang dynasty in the mid-11th century B.C.E. But King Wu died shortly after the victory. His heir, Prince Cheng, was much too young to rule, and the Duke of Zhou chose to rule in his place until the young man became old enough to take the reins of government on his own.
- ◆ The Duke of Zhou had to endure withering attacks on his character from officials who were certain that he simply planned to dispose of the heir and rule alone. In later centuries in China, such usurpations would

occur quite frequently, but the Duke of Zhou insisted that he would be a teacher to the prince, even as he worked to solidify the foundations of what would become an 800-year dynasty. When King Cheng came of age, having learned lessons in ruling from his uncle, the Duke of Zhou quietly stepped aside. That is the rich blend of mythology and history that have echoed for centuries in China.

- ◆ It was those teachings—the ways of the honorable Duke of Zhou—that Confucius wished to bring back. His people had lost their way, and he knew in his heart and mind that the lessons rested in the leadership and demeanor of the great duke. Confucius wanted the Zhou order to prevail, and he sought in his own teaching to articulate just how that should happen. In a profound sense, the *Analects* is about bringing back a simpler and more harmonious society—the world of the Duke of Zhou.
- ◆ The Zhou dynasty in which Confucius lived had begun as a loose confederation of states—200 or more—linked in theory and ritual practice to the Zhou king. That was in the 11th century B.C.E., the period that Confucius revered. Over the centuries, however, the common human tendency to occupy other territories and vie for ascendancy took its toll. Two hundred mostly tiny states became, in a process of swallow-or-be-swallowed, 100—and then 50.
- ◆ When Confucius looked at the future, he saw disaster; and he urgently called on people to change their ways in order to prevent it. And disaster came. It was partly Confucius's prescience that convinced later generations, as they finally emerged from a brutal era, to revisit his ideas.
- ◆ In Confucius's day, however, few listened. It seems that people in power had little use for his insights. His earnest counsel never led to steady employment, whether in his home state of Lu or beyond.
- ◆ Confucius was certain that he could put his ideas into practice. What he lacked was any significant opportunity to bring his ideas beyond what today we call the classroom. And so, with a palpable sense of resignation, he taught.

Suggested Reading

Gardner, *Confucianism*.

Oldstone-Moore, *Confucianism*.

Rainey, *Confucius and Confucianism*.

Questions to Consider

1. Think about times when society seems to have gone “to hell in a hand basket.” What kinds of people emerge to address the situation? How do they do it?
2. What are the implications of “performative” texts—from Confucius’s *Analects* to Plato’s dialogues? What distinguishes them from other kinds of texts?

Lecture 2

THE *ANALECTS*: A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Imagination. That one word sums up Confucius, the *Analects*, and the influence of his teachings. Confucius's critics dismissed him as a narrow-minded pedant, but he was anything but that. He offers invaluable insights on how to live your life. Don't just earn your keep and rest on your days off, he urges; look, learn, imagine, teach. Live your work (and certainly don't just work to live, if you can help it). Think about it, ponder it, and find elements of lasting reflection even in the simplest of daily activities. This course will show you why and how to make Confucius's text into a lifetime teaching tool for yourself, your family, your community, and the larger world, just as Confucius intended.

IMAGINATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- ◆ C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* is a classic of social thought. In this slender volume, Mills writes about his work not as if it were a job; for Mills, his work seemed to be an all-encompassing outlook on the world. In other words, real imagination and creativity had to be a full-time occupation. It couldn't just be turned on and off.
- ◆ Mills continues by underlining how essential this combining of ideas that he described really is—and how subjective (and sometimes even unacademic) it all feels. Mills says that truly, deeply imaginative social thinkers cannot, will not, and could never close it down. They are always thinking, always reflecting, and always learning new things about a changing world. Such imagination feeds on every experience that we have, and it

goes so far beyond simply earning a living as to be in a different category of entrepreneurship altogether.

- ◆ “Go all in,” Mills almost shouts at his readers. Risk having loose, sloppy, and first-draft-style ideas. Sense that “this thing” over here and “that thing” over there might be related. Then mull it over, talk about it, and dive into more analysis. Don’t sit on the sidelines, and don’t check out after a good day’s work. Live your work, and then share it with others.
- ◆ C. Wright Mills was onto something, and Confucius likely would have agreed with him. People have a thirst for knowledge and for lessons they can internalize—lessons that might make them better individuals, better family members, and better members of larger communities.
- ◆ At least in the West, we too often hear these lessons through the voice of individual character. But what we are starved for—often without fully realizing it—is a different kind of lesson: We want to know how to live with integrity with others. No amount of personal integrity alone can work if we don’t know how to carry out our lives with other people, in community, in society.
- ◆ What we must learn is that living well in the world (and solving the large and small challenges all around us) requires a remarkable combination of ethical and social imagination.
- ◆ From the University of Hawaii to Harvard, and from Montana to Texas—and all throughout North America, Europe, and the rest of the world—courses in Chinese philosophy have produced robust enrollment figures, even at a time when many people bemoan the sheer practicality of interests among students. Something is going on, and we would do best to listen to that hunger for understanding.

THE WESTERN APPROACH

- ◆ One of the best books about philosophy is Bryan Magee’s memoir, *Confessions of a Philosopher*. Although Magee’s book is squarely about the

Western philosophical tradition, he raises an important point for all of us early on.

- ◆ Magee feels that the profession of philosophy has failed us and that it has done so exactly when we need it most. He describes his own experience studying philosophy at Oxford in the 1950s and being disgusted with what he regarded as the tiny little questions about how we use language favored by analytical philosophers of that era. It wasn't until he undertook a year of study at Yale in the 1960s that, in reading Immanuel Kant's three critiques (*The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and *The Critique of Judgment*), Magee found a philosopher who asked big philosophical questions on what life in our world is all about.
- ◆ But here's the problem: Westerners tend to think about big questions through one of two lenses. Sometimes we contemplate the great structures of the universe or the vast sweep of human history, and other times we study the tiny structures that shape our knowledge, from DNA to subatomic particles. Both lenses embody the Western emphasis on logic, rationality, and a highly individualistic view of the world.
- ◆ Confucius certainly doesn't seem to be looking at the world through those lenses, nor does he seem to be asking the big questions of which Bryan Magee spoke. Immanuel Kant asked how we know what we think we know. He asked about our aesthetic standards. He argued for uncompromising ethical standards. How could Confucius ever compete with that?
- ◆ In fact, Confucius's *Analects* does deal with the big questions. Questions don't get any bigger than how we should live our lives with and among others.

THE CONFUCIAN APPROACH

- ◆ In years past, the consensus among students and professors of Chinese studies was that Confucius was an impractical, rulemaking bore. The general view was that he had little to teach us in modern society and that the *Analects* was only of value for what it could tell us about China's

past. The idea that Confucius could be the carrier of a vital message, of a way of knowing and acting in the world, struck many academics as nonsense.

- ◆ Confucian engagement differs radically from many Western ideals of disengaged study from the outside. To comprehend the *Analects*, you must be all in. You must enter the conversation, the complex exchange of questions and answers, assertions and observations, challenges and retorts that make up the gentle pedagogical rhythms of the *Analects*.
- ◆ The *Analects* welcomes the reader who is willing to engage with it. But learning to do so can admittedly be challenging. What follows is an example of this type of exchange, so that you can see how you might enter the conversation of the *Analects* yourself.
- ◆ A large number of entries in Confucius's *Analects* set up a special kind of social scene. It is one in which someone (sometimes dukes and territorial governors, other times his own students) ask him a question. His answers can help us to enter the growing dialogue. Be sure to listen for these social interactions.

魯存賜令



17.8

The Master said, “Zilu! Have you heard of the six negative qualities and the six positive qualities?” “No, I haven’t,” replied Zilu. “Well, sit down then,” said the Master. “I

will instruct you. Wanting to be consummate in conduct but not wanting to study—that is a first flaw, and it will lead to fatuousness. Wanting knowledge but not wanting to study—that is a second flaw, and it will lead to rootlessness.”

The Master continues:

“Wanting to be true to one’s word, but not wanting to study—that is a third flaw, and it leads to impairment. Wanting to be upright, but not wanting to study—that is a fourth flaw, and it leads to impudence. Wanting to be brave without wanting to study—that is a fifth flaw, and it leads to disorder. Finally, wanting to be solid and firm but not wanting to study—that is a sixth flaw, and it leads to foolhardiness.”

.....

- ◆ This kind of entry teaches the reader (or listener) how to enter the conversation. In this passage, Confucius uses a series of ordinary words and contrasts them with studying or not studying. People who confronted Confucius’s teachings during the master’s lifetime, as well as in the decades and centuries that followed, were hearing something different from the ways they used those words.
- ◆ Confucius used concepts in new and sometimes startling ways. Interactions like the one above are an example of Confucius teaching his listeners how to think creatively—imaginatively—and to continue to do so for themselves and for others.
- ◆ If you are still struggling to grasp how the text of the *Analects* works, don’t despair. There will be many more opportunities in this course to understand it. Rest assured that you’re not alone; plenty of people who earnestly wish to understand Confucius’s message have tried (often repeatedly) to do so.

- ◆ The *Analects* is difficult to penetrate at the outset. But if you can master the essentials of reading it, you will find yourself greatly rewarded and your life enriched, as many persistent readers have discovered. To do so requires that you enter the world of the text in a way that is different from the one in which most of us were trained.
- ◆ Imagine what it was like in a much earlier era, when information at the click of a button was a thing of utter fantasy. Imagine a world in which the gift of a book could change your life forever. Imagine a world in which you didn't just read, but read, reread, read again, and lived a book. It is so far from the way that we think today that we need to remind ourselves of the power that a single book can contain.
- ◆ Confucius's *Analects* contains that kind of transformative power, and you can experience it for yourself if you approach the book in the right way. It must be read, reread, and lived.

Suggested Reading

Chin, *The Authentic Confucius*.

Fingarette, *Confucius*.

Inoue, *Confucius*.

Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Western philosophical tradition places a heavy focus upon “rationality” in decision-making. Confucius maintains that one must be “all in.” What are the implications of being personally invested in how and what one learns?
2. Is it possible to be “Confucian” outside of China?

Lecture 3

THE MAN WE CALL CONFUCIUS

Confucius failed to put the ideas he taught into practice. He sought to change the society in which he lived, but he received only the barest attention from local or regional rulers. From the perspective of his life experience, it would have been impossible to guess that he would become the most influential person in his society and one of the most important figures in world history. How he achieved that status is quite a story, yet even that story's majestic outline comes to us in tiny snippets that give just a few pieces of the complex mosaic of his life and teaching.

BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

- ◆ Most of what we know about Confucius comes from the text of the *Analects* itself. A great deal of additional information about Confucius's home state of Lu and some of the prominent people in Lu public life, including Confucius and several of his students, is contained in a text called the *Zuozhuan* (*Zuo Commentary*)—a narrative commentary on a terse historical work, the *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*), covering three centuries of life in eastern China.
- ◆ More details can be gleaned from writers claiming to know about how Confucius lived, even though some were born long after him. Perhaps the most influential of these is Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.), the only other Chinese figure to be given a Latinized name by the earliest Western translators. Another thinker, Mencius's contemporary Xunzi (c. 310–c. 220 B.C.E.), explicated many of Confucius's teachings in his own highly refined set of essays. A further thinker from a tradition often critical of the

Confucians presents several surprisingly detailed and insightful portrayals of Confucius. This author, Zhuangzi (c. 370–287 B.C.E.), could be eviscerating in his criticism and yet wonderfully nuanced in his descriptions of a frail Confucius.

- ◆ The most comprehensive treatment of all was compiled by one of China's greatest historians, Sima Qian. Writing almost four centuries after Confucius's death, Sima Qian's biography of Confucius in his elaborate and influential *Historical Records (Shiji)* so deeply influenced the interpretation of Confucius's life and work that we must take it seriously, despite clear evidence that it was written long after Confucius's death and that enormous amounts of the biography are highly embellished. For more than 2,000 years, it has shaped the way readers in China view Confucius.
- ◆ As we take our first steps down this biographical path, keep in mind the concept of veridicality. In a nutshell, veridicality means that something is "in accordance with the historical sources." Because Confucius lived 2,500 years ago, we will never know what happened in his life with any degree of certainty. This fact requires that we strengthen our resolve, know what we can know, accept that some things we might never know, and keep learning all of the time.

TEXTUAL FRAGMENTS OF CONFUCIUS'S LIFE

- ◆ In the *Analects*, Confucius emphasized a term that is one of the most powerful and persistent in all of Chinese thought: the Way. Synonyms for the Chinese character (道) range from "way" to "path," "road," "route," and more. It is one of the most ancient of concepts, and it is also pre-sectarian—before the divided schools of thought of Confucius's and later eras. To lead a life, to function in society, was to be on the Way.
- ◆ Confucius used the Way to establish his message. In many respects, the *Analects* frames the Way as a combination of an individual's life path with the larger path (or paths) that make up a civilization. It is a complex melding of individual and society that leads toward a better or (as Confucius worriedly taught) a worse society.

- ◆ Confucius lived from 551–479 B.C.E. When he was born, the Zhou dynastic order that was the touchstone for his philosophy was beginning a slow process of unraveling. By the time Confucius died, his world was on the verge of serious disorder that would cause disruptions for the next 250 years.
- ◆ One item in the *Analects* states that Confucius's origins were quite humble and that his family was by no means well-off. His father died when he was young, and his mother raised him under difficult circumstances. Confucius stated that his hardy youth was quite problematic. He spent much of his youth doing odd jobs and, in the process, learning practical skills in order to survive.
- ◆ Americans often hear of Confucius's hardy youth and read into it a kind of Horatio Alger narrative about “pulling himself up by the bootstraps” or “rising from the mailroom to the boardroom.” Such an interpretation could occasionally be heard in China, too, but Confucius was having none of it. “It would have been far better to study,” he notes in the *Analects*.
- ◆ One can see in Confucius's statement a kind of frustration with the marginalization he experienced along social or even class lines, and this should be taken seriously. Confucius never quite broke through to the successes he imagined, and a combined puzzlement and resentment is apparent throughout the *Analects*. On the other hand, there seems to be much more to his statement. Confucius genuinely believed that study was truly a lifetime process and that it should begin early in life. For him, learning the ways of peasants, laborers, shopkeepers, and travelers paled in comparison to careful learning and reflection from great texts.
- ◆ Confucius spent most of his life failing to make a mark, yet he persisted. One of the most famous of all passages in the *Analects* describes a life of endless trying—never giving up, even when there is little or no chance of success.

14.38

Zilu spent the night at Stone Gate. The morning gatekeeper inquired, “Where are you from?” Zilu replied, “From Confucius’s academy.” The gatekeeper said, “Isn’t he the one who knows that his objective cannot be accomplished, and yet he keeps on moving forward anyway?”

- ◆ Making a difference mattered profoundly to Confucius, and he sought to put his ideas into practice. Sometimes he even seems to lose his way, and more than occasionally we sense that he doesn’t have the right feel for the target.
- ◆ As he moved through his later decades—now called to serve or counsel, now ignored and waiting for the next summons—Confucius was always ready to try a new target, to hit his mark just right. But not once, in all of his years, was he able to strike the target to his satisfaction.

陽貨餽豚



CONFUCIUS'S TEACHING CAREER

- ◆ Confucius's career as a teacher, although shaped by a lifetime of travel, frustration, despair, and hope, lasted for only five years, from 484–479 B.C.E. Those five years were an exceptionally brief period in which to make a name that would shine as China's greatest teacher for 2,500 years.
- ◆ The structure and organization of Confucius's "school" can only be gleaned from scattered items in the *Analects*. For example, one fascinating glimpse into the give-and-take between the master and his disciples, or the teacher and his students, can be found in a dynamic exchange with several students.

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11.22

Zilu asked, "When learning something, should I put it right into practice?" The Master replied, "Your father and elder brothers are still alive; how would you dare to act immediately after learning something?" Ran Qiu then asked the same question. The Master replied, "Yes. Upon learning something, put it into action forthwith."

.....

- ◆ Here Confucius is in his full teacherly mode. Two different students, with different characters and personalities, ask the sage the same question. What they get is not one, but two different answers. To make sense of this, let's examine Confucius's answer when a third student asks for clarification.

.....

11.22

Gongxi Hua inquired, "When Zilu asked, you told him to hesitate—to defer to his family's elders. Yet when Ran Qiu asked the very same question, you told him to proceed with

alacrity. This befuddles me; dare I ask what you meant?"

"The Master replied, "Ran Qiu is timid and reserved, so I exhorted him to go forward; Zilu possesses the intensity of two people, so I wanted to restrain him."

.....

- ◆ Here we see the full force of the teaching dynamic in the *Analects*. Confucius is in his element as he tailors his message to the specific needs, as he perceives them, of each of his students. There are few cookie-cutter templates in Confucius's teachings. He seems to understand that the world is made up of many different kinds of people and circumstances. While there are common principles going back to the Duke of Zhou whom Confucius so idolized, and even beyond, action must be crafted.
- ◆ For Confucius, learning was a powerful joint effort between teacher and student, and he wanted students who, in today's terms, wanted to be there. He had no interest at all in passive learning, and he set a high bar for interaction and reflection for each of his students.
- ◆ The *Analects* reflects both Confucius's despair and hope that his work would achieve positive change in his world. It was perhaps those warring emotions that produced his insistence on rituals, music, and rules. In his view, attention to these matters would strengthen the social order; but he always tailored his teachings to meet the specific needs of his students.
- ◆ When Confucius died in 479 B.C.E., he was not a person of great influence. Yet the man who would reign above all teachers in Chinese history answered, at least after a fashion, the very questions about personal character, flexibility, and complexity that we have been asking.
- ◆ The *Analects* also gives us a glimpse at Confucius's own account of his teaching philosophy, long before others would argue about it for themselves. It all holds together; he says, in one winding line.

.....

15.3

The Master said, “Zigong, do you see me as someone who has studied a great deal and has internalized it?” Zigong replied, “Yes, indeed I do think that. Is it not correct?” The Master replied, “No it is not correct. Rather, I possess it as a single strand.”

.....

- ◆ Over time, that “continuous strand” (and the threads contained in that strand) grew in stature and influence.

Suggested Reading

Chin, *The Authentic Confucius*.

Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*.

Watson, *The Tso Chuan*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the implications of the delay between Confucius's actual teachings and the distribution of the *Analects* as a book?
2. Is Confucius flexible?

HOW THE *ANALECTS* IS ORGANIZED

The most successful readers are those who patiently get to know the *Analects* rather than stubbornly trying to ring meaning from it through sheer force of intellectual will. While the text of the *Analects* appears to be disorganized, there are actually several patterns holding it together. In this lecture, you will learn about some of these patterns. Look for the patterns, and you will be well on your way to understanding a text that has stumped Westerners (and more than a few East Asian readers) for centuries.

READING THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ One way to think about Confucius's *Analects* is that it contains a series of significant teachings that are carved into little pieces—*analects*—and scattered in almost random fashion throughout the text. The scattered nature of the text has made reading it a challenge for Westerners who have sought the teachings of a great thinker. They often expect far more systematic coverage than the *Analects* offers.
- ◆ The way that the text of the *Analects* is taught today in China, Taiwan, Singapore, and beyond emphasizes the supposedly “most important” sayings in the text. In other words, it cherry-picks the material that those in charge (parents, teachers, and government bureaucrats) want young people to learn. And then they are tested repeatedly on them. A fascinating and troubling result is that students who pass the high school and college examinations know parts of the text of the *Analects* very well.

They have memorized some of the phrases “for the tests” and can repeat them verbatim in almost any context. But they do not know the book as a whole.

- ◆ Today, Confucius’s *Analects* has been endlessly mined for the “essentials”—a problematic concept if ever there was one. The “most important” passages have been set aside and combined into small booklets. As a result, in China and the West, we have today a problematic and fragmented understanding of a very great book, not least because almost no one reads the whole thing anymore. In this course, we will begin to put the text back together again. We won’t be able to go start to finish, but we will continue to use this principle of sequential reading as much as possible.
- ◆ There was a time not too long ago when young readers read the *Analects* from beginning to end. Indeed, they memorized the 500 sayings that were arranged into 20 unevenly spaced chapters. And it was not just that they studied harder that made them better readers of the *Analects*. They knew the text. They knew its gaps, its nuances, and its rhythm.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ There are several structural levels at work in the *Analects*. The most basic will be referred to in this course as “chapters.” The Chinese term is *juan*, and it refers to a unit of text that originally was bound separately. Early manuscripts written on bamboo formed a limited space for copying a text. In time, the *juan* became the formative division in all of Chinese writing. Exceedingly long texts were not described in pages, but rather in the number of chapters or *juan*.
- ◆ Confucius’s *Analects* contains 20 *juan*. The first *juan* contains 16 phrases of varying lengths, the second 24, and the last—the twentieth—just three. The longest *juan* in terms of individual passages is the fourteenth, with 44 items.
- ◆ There is a staccato-like, performative dimension to the *Analects*, and in many ways its chapters work in ways akin to scenes in dramatic writing. Each chapter is a cluster of seemingly unrelated phrases, but each sets the

scene, so to speak, for the next. The experience of reading the *Analects* from beginning to end, then, feels a great deal more like reading drama than an extended philosophical argument.

- ◆ The greatest challenge in thinking of the divisions of the *Analects* as chapters is that they are not really about anything. Not one of them is organized under a topic or a theme and certainly not a fully-formed plot. There is no clearly discernable relationship, to a modern sensibility—and especially to a Western one—between the first passage in a chapter and the last. This can make learning the text maddening to readers experienced in reading other literary traditions.
- ◆ The chapter titles themselves illustrate the issue. It was only much later in the Chinese tradition—long after Confucius lived—that chapters began to have titles that foretold what might be contained within the chapter as a whole, its argument, or story. Following a practice that was already established long before Confucius, the *Analects* contains 20 titles of two characters each. Each consists of a multiword title constructed in the same way—based, with only one exception, on two characters taken from the first line of each chapter.
- ◆ This titling process tries to find the first two substantive characters of the chapter; and those selections have become embedded in memory for serious readers over the centuries. Any well-read scholar could immediately recite the 20 chapter titles of the *Analects* without delay. But the titles amount to something just short of gibberish in terms of telling what each chapter contains.
- ◆ Here the process becomes even more strange: The titles of the last nine chapters all contain names of actual people, sometimes with their official titles. To the uninitiated, this seems to imply that the chapter will be about that person, or at least that the person will play a large role in the chapter. It is almost never the case, however. So even though a chapter may be given the title “Yan Yuan,” one of the names referring to Confucius’s favorite student, it is a stretch to think of the chapter as being about him. A few statements may deal with him, but that is the extent of it.

- ◆ Going even further, it is not even an absolutely strict rule that chapter titles be exactly two characters long. Because chapter 15 contains a character for a person's title, it is the only one that is three characters long.
- ◆ All of these details sound immensely strange—chapter titles that everyone knows, yet they have almost nothing to do with the contents within—but don't worry. It is part of an even larger structure that begins to make sense if you stay with it. It is almost as though the chaos of 500 individual sayings under 20 arbitrary (but painstakingly memorized) chapter titles is a cruel postmodern trick played upon gullible readers trying to find meaning.
- ◆ Most of us are drawn to find linkages of some kind, and the challenges are enormous when confronting a text such as the *Analects*. If we ignore this issue, we are in danger of sensing far too much continuity in a text that truly represents a scattering of significant sayings. We have to learn to read the *Analects* in a way that grasps those continuities as part of a grander pattern, but avoids the temptation to assume that statements inevitably build upon each other.
- ◆ While we certainly can (and will) take away key lessons from the *Analects*, we should not forget that it is really a grand orchestration of themes that bring together the teachings of earlier eras and seek to perpetuate them into new eras. That such a project has lasted well into a third millennium of influence in China should tell us that something beyond a mere confusion of words, passages, and chapters, is going on.

READING CLASSICAL CHINESE TEXTS

- ◆ Chinese readers often face certain challenges when reading classical Chinese. They already know many of the Chinese characters being used, but they lack deep experience with the key grammatical particles that make classical Chinese much more spare in terms of linguistic context and infinitely more complex.

- ◆ In addition, the classical language has changed quite dramatically over the generations. As a result, many of the characters modern readers think of as unproblematic actually mean something a bit different than they think. Many combinations of two characters take on dramatically different meanings when read in a classical text.
- ◆ An even more thorny problem in early Chinese documents is that there is no punctuation. The commas and colons and spaces that are a part of punctuated modern editions are not present in the classical texts. The classical Chinese of Confucius's day was an elaborate puzzle that required creative readers to sort out everything. In addition to reading everything from beginning to end, readers had to figure out even where the “sayings” began and ended. While there certainly are grammatical clues in many cases, it remains an enormous challenge.
- ◆ The implications of this reader-centered analysis would give literature professors much to think about, but the reality when we consider how people have read the *Analects* over many centuries was the following: Readers were confronted with approximately 500 sayings arranged in 20 chapters, each with a title drawn from two of the initial characters in the text. Where chapters began and ended was clear enough (there are gaps in the original bamboo panels, after all), but within each chapter the main text was interspersed with many lines—and sometimes pages—of small print commentary. This commentary appeared in the middle of the page, separated from the main text, and at the bottom of the page. And there was no punctuation whatsoever. Readers had to determine the syntax for themselves, often with the aid of teachers and guidebooks.
- ◆ Like the punctuation that readers had to insert using their own interpretive skills, understanding how the *Analects* work is a creative act. It can teach profound lessons, even amidst so much seeming chaos.

Suggested Reading

Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*.

Frye, *The Great Code*.

Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is a "title?" What is a "chapter?"
2. Punctuation is a creative act in early Chinese texts. How does punctuation work in changing media, such as social media?

THE PROVENANCE OF THE *ANALECTS*

In recent years, archaeological discoveries have transformed scholars' understanding of early Chinese texts, including the *Analects*. Such discoveries have often created interpretive confusion where scholars had for many years felt certainty. With more discoveries on the way, the only thing that is certain is that the understanding of the *Analects* will continue changing throughout our lifetimes and well beyond.

THE IMPACT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

- ◆ When it comes to our understanding of Confucius's *Analects* and other classical Chinese texts, we live in interesting times, and most of the developments have been enormously positive. New knowledge is forcing us to rethink assumptions we have had about early Chinese society and the texts that have steered our interpretations. Much of this new knowledge comes from archaeological discoveries in ancient tombs and other sites.
- ◆ For all the tumult in modern Chinese politics, a kind of archaeological humility has remained, intent on preserving the past and using the best tools available—even waiting decades in some cases to excavate significant sites, in hopes that better technology will aid the process.
- ◆ Among the most significant items found thus far have been books. These discoveries have changed the way we read early Chinese history, often in dramatic fashion, and have profoundly clarified the meaning of classical Chinese texts.

- ◆ For example, the books did not assume the finished or “received” forms until many decades, and often even centuries, after they were first composed. Writers edited, reflected, moved text, discussed the growing work with others, and kept tinkering. That tinkering would be lost to us without the riches we have gained from archaeological discoveries of buried texts.
- ◆ Through examination of these discovered texts, we have learned that some of the actual Chinese characters differed, even when the meaning was strikingly similar. The grammatical patterns are often different as well.
- ◆ If these details seem minor, realize that moving whole sections of text from, for example, the beginning to the middle—and something else from the middle to the opening—can have profound implications for a text that has been read and admired for several thousand years.

TINKERING WITH TEXTS

- ◆ Scholars and local courts kept busy in early Chinese history. They not only fought for ascendancy in a changing political order, but also strove for intellectual impact.
- ◆ During this period, thinkers were sought after. Rulers understood that they needed these people that today we call philosophers. From a Warring States perspective, however, they might more properly be called high-powered consultants.
- ◆ The stakes were high, the services of these thinkers cost fortunes, and their views were contested, often bitterly so. Thinkers we today call “Confucian” disdained Daoist ideas for their simplicity, while Daoists mocked the rules and regulations that Confucians created—and they were only a small part of what are often called the Hundred Schools of the period. All sides advised states that won and lost.
- ◆ Some successful thinkers received major positions. Other successful thinkers seemingly avoided politics (while still crafting a political message that might be heard much later).

- ◆ Through it all, these advisers, their subordinates, and the people who employed them tinkered with texts such as the *Analects*, even while writing their own works. The process was the intricate (and occasionally clumsy) work of many different hands, with more than a few tinkers having a stake in whether or not Confucius (or any other author) was taken seriously.
- ◆ This process continued through the first great unification of China in the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.) and the subsequent Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). It was not until the first centuries of the Common Era, 2,000 years ago, that classical texts much like we read today would emerge. Before that, there was tinkering and enormous social change.

THE DINGZHOU *ANALECTS*

- ◆ There is a marvelous detective story built into the discovery and painstaking editing of the oldest version of the *Analects* that we have today. What we have learned from scattered bamboo fragments found in a tomb in north-central China confirms that those *Analects* contain linguistic alterations, differences in organization, and other slight variations on preceding versions. Four hundred years after its first bits were composed, it's clear that the *Analects* wasn't quite finished yet.
- ◆ Found in Hebei province, Dingzhou Tomb #40 belonged to an ally of an early Han dynasty emperor in the 1st century B.C.E. The tomb was a rare find, because officials of relatively insignificant status such as the one found there ordinarily did not merit elaborate burial.
- ◆ The tomb and its contents were beset by a series of misfortunes that would seem to be the stuff of fiction, had they not been documented over the course of the last 40 years. But the tomb has helped us attain a deeper understanding of the *Analects* regardless.
- ◆ One of the most common problems for tombs all over the world is robbery. In the case of the Dingzhou tomb, there definitely was robbery, and a good portion of the tomb's many contents were plundered. It

seems clear that the thieves were after the most precious possession in the tomb: an elaborate tunic of jade, held together by golden threads. Countless tombs in China have had the corpses stripped of jade, but this one survived. Only a few pieces of jade are missing, and the tunic tells us a great deal about Chinese burial practices of the time.

- ◆ The survival of the jade tunic in the Dingzhou tomb can partly be attributed to an intricate and sturdy outer coffin that made robbery not only cumbersome, but also an engineering challenge requiring sophisticated thieves with the appropriate tools. However, many other jade costumes were pilfered before and after the robbery of the Dingzhou tomb. Something else happened at Dingzhou, and it is one of the only reasons that we also have a version of the *Analects* composed some four centuries after Confucius's death: during the robbery, there was a fire.
- ◆ When the fire broke out, the robbers fled, dropping bits of jade, text, and bronze as they hurried out. The records do not indicate that any robbers died in the attempt, and the tomb seems not to have been disturbed again. The jade tunic remained.
- ◆ This is the confused scene that archaeologists came upon in 1973. The archaeologists found one of the most stunningly intact jade costumes ever found on a corpse, along with several metallic objects that survived a fierce fire in a wooden construction. And then they entered the eastern compartment of the rear chamber. That corner was the small study reserved for the deceased, and it had a special knife used by ancient writers, three large ink slabs, a copper pot, and a significant number of texts organized in bamboo slips.
- ◆ Some of the texts that were in this library for the deceased had been stolen, but the remaining ones were charred by the fire—some almost beyond recognition. Many of the bamboo strips have hard- or impossible-to-read characters, often at the edges of the strips. As happens after a century or so, even in the best preserved tombs, the threads that hold the bamboo strips together disintegrate, leaving the bamboo strips to fall into each other, losing any sequencing that we might have been able

to grasp had they still been connected by threads. Nonetheless, it was a spectacular find, and the various strips and fragments were sent to Beijing for further study at the National Cultural Relics Bureau.

- ◆ Work began at the National Cultural Relics Bureau a year later, in 1974. By its nature it was painstaking, but it occurred during a time of enormous upheaval and change in the People's Republic of China. In addition, many of the country's leading scholars were working on discoveries to the south at Mawangdui. Several of those scholars joined the Dingzhou project later, in 1976, and everything looked hopeful as they began systematically transcribing the bamboo strips onto carefully organized cards.
- ◆ But in July 1976, one of most disastrous earthquakes in modern history shook northern China. This Tangshan earthquake devastated large portions of the countryside, killing thousands of people. The earthquake also tipped the wooden storage chest containing the precious bamboo fragments from Dingzhou Tomb #40. The chest opened as it fell to the ground, and the fragments scattered across the floor. Any sense of organization that might have seemed possible was now gone. Worse, many of the fragile strips were further damaged, and characters that had seemed possible to decipher after the initial discovery now were gibberish.
- ◆ Work continued until 1981, but was halted again. Finally, in 1993, a final report was published. Knowing the fate of the oldest *Analects* in a bewildering stream of bad luck makes that report seem disappointing, but what we have learned about the *Analects* from the Dingzhou discovery is still significant.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DINGZHOU *ANAELECTS*

- ◆ While many early texts have somewhat different patterns and phrasings—not to mention word choice—from those schoolchildren memorized for generation, there is a remarkable consistency at work, as well. Based on the Dingzhou *Analects*, the similarities to current editions far outweigh the differences. It is fundamentally the same text that we study today.

- ◆ Nevertheless, almost every single line of the Dingzhou *Analects* contains something that varies from today's received text. Reviewing some of these differences will give us a better sense of just what archaeology means in the preservation and teaching of a world classic.
- ◆ First, there are hundreds of locations (over 700, depending on how one counts) in which the Dingzhou *Analects* varies from the *Analects* that was taught in most schools throughout Chinese history. What we cannot know at this point is the order of the chapters or even the chapter titles. Because they were preserved, and then scattered, in bamboo strips—not to mention plundered and overturned—we will never know if the contents of this text had a different order.
- ◆ Sometimes the characters used in the Dingzhou *Analects* are very basic roots of more complex ones in today's text—中 for 仲 (middle), or 間 for 簡 (between). Other times, the forms are more specific than found in today's text—智 for 知 (knowledge), or 壹 for 一 (one). There are many more, and they get quite technical, but this will give you a sense of another type of difference in the Dingzhou *Analects*.
- ◆ One of the most interesting ways that the Dingzhou *Analects* differs from more recent versions is in the very passages themselves. What we can see in the archaeological fragments is that some of the divisions within the text may be more arbitrary than a carefully memorizing schoolchild would ever realize. What we have learned about punctuation as a creative act takes on added significance here.
- ◆ The Dingzhou *Analects* creates a fascinating picture of similarity and difference at work. On one hand, the text seems to hold together in much the same way that our more recent versions do. On the other hand, almost every line contains something different. After 15 or more centuries of learners memorizing the same combinations of words, we now live in a time when any classical text we might have read could “change” any day.

Suggested Reading

Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*.

Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*.

Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*.

Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*.

Questions to Consider

1. What can we learn from “underground” that is different from “above ground?”
2. Tumultuous times often bring intense intellectual engagement. Beyond the Warring States period in China, what other times of conflict come to mind (and what texts are associated with them)?

Lecture 6

THE ANALECTS IN MINIATURE

As you have learned, the text of the *Analects* took many centuries to form, and the order of the passages and chapters do not reflect meticulous single authorship. Nevertheless, the opening passages of the *Analects* set the tone for the entire text as it has been read for most of the past 2,000 years. From individual conduct to running the state itself, the core themes of the *Analects* are all present in these five passages.

ANALECTS 1.1

- ◆ The first lines of the *Analects* are so famous, so ubiquitous in Chinese culture, and so often quoted in Chinese life that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that everyone in China knows them. But even though everyone may have heard of the first passage of the *Analects* and may even be able to recite it, it is still a formidable jumble of ideas.

.....

1.1

The Master said, "To study, and then find opportunities to make use of it, is this not indeed a pleasure? To have friends arrive from distant places, is this not indeed a source of enjoyment? To be unacknowledged or misunderstood by others, and yet to harbor no resentment, is this not the mark of an exemplary person (君子)?"

.....

- ◆ The last two words—"exemplary person"—are a translation of the Chinese phrase *junzi* (君子). For decades, translators have rendered that phrase as "the gentleman." However, "gentleman" is probably more Victorian than is helpful for a modern reader of the English language. Something resembling Confucius's vision is present in the older term, but the alternative translation of *junzi* as "exemplary person" brings together more of the multiple meanings hinted at in the text.
- ◆ The next element concerns when friends arrive from distant places. Indeed, few things are more joyful than companions coming from afar. This line is so common in Chinese conversation that it gets mentioned to the point of cliché. It is hardly unusual for someone to utter it when seeing a friend or acquaintance after a long time away. But there is more to this statement.
- ◆ On traditional Chinese calendars, which contain not only dates but all manner of interesting commentary, you will find certain days that are designated as particularly good or bad for various activities. None of these calendars, however, list a day as bad for study. It is just that some days are especially good for it. This undoubtedly reflects Confucian influence. In the vast majority of cases, the Chinese characters noting that it is a good day for study are paired immediately with the information that it is also a good day for gathering with friends. Friendship and learning form the very heart of social communion in the world of the *Analects*.
- ◆ Just as the first two statements of *Analects* 1.1 seem to be independent of each other until we understand coming together in intellectual companionship and communion, the third speaks to the whole person—the one who studies, reflects, shares views, discusses with others, and truly wants to make a difference in the world, as Confucius did.

ANALECTS 1.2

- ◆ From the solid structure of the first passage in the *Analects*, the text passes the "narrative" to one of Confucius's students.

- ◆ This back-and-forth between master and followers is not unusual. It was those very students who kept alive Confucius's teachings after his death, in part by compiling the *Analects* itself. In a very real sense, it is their book.
- ◆ Although the *Analects* is dominated by statements and discussion topics initiated by Confucius, a large number of the entries are attributed to either his students or (occasionally) someone outside the setting of Confucius's school. The second statement in the *Analects* follows this pattern. Here, a colleague the students turned to by the name of Youzi speaks to the foundation of all human character:

.....

1.2

Master You said, "Rare indeed is the person of filial and fraternal conduct (孝弟) who yet enjoys defying his superiors. And among those not inclined to defy authority, there has never been one who incited rebellion. Exemplary people (君子) focus upon the roots. Once the roots are established, the Way will grow and spread. As for filial and fraternal conduct, they are, I suspect, the root of all consummate conduct (仁)."

.....

- ◆ At the core of the best people and their actions is respect for superiors and a desire not to create disorder. Even further, those people work together in a hierarchy of knowledge, values, and expectations. While the first passage in the *Analects* speaks across many world cultures and civilizations, this one might strike at least some Western listeners a bit more abrasively.
- ◆ Here we see at least one strain of what has appealed to Chinese rulers since Confucius's time: an emphasis on harmony, and one explicitly linked to respecting authority. There is a hierarchical dynamic at work in

Confucian thought, and it will color almost everything we encounter in the *Analects* from this point forward.

- ◆ That hierarchy does not occur in any significant sense in the opening passage is a surprise. It is almost everywhere else in the text and in Chinese society. It is important, however, to distinguish respect for hierarchy from blind obedience. In this passage, Youzi states that having the best kind of conduct is grounded in being a good sibling and child. The best kind of person does not create discord in the family or beyond it.
- ◆ A shallow misinterpretation of this passage has led many Chinese rulers to mistaken judgments. One of the reasons that today's Chinese Communist Party leaders have embraced Confucius more warmly than almost anyone would have anticipated is this very emphasis in *Analects* 1.2 on harmony. Even without saying the word "harmony," it can be taken as a defense of the status quo. However, that is not what many interpreters think Confucius and his students meant, any more than they wished to level society into everyone being equal.

ANALECTS 1.3

- ◆ The *Analects* follows the two complex and comprehensive passage that lead the document with a spare, succinct, and to-the-point assertion that you had better have substance, because all polish and no grit just won't do the job. *Analects* 1.3 is a delight, but it is far from simple.

.....

1.3

The Master said, "Rare indeed is it when glib words
and [ostentatious] appearance accompany consummate
conduct (仁)."

- ◆ This is a passage that speaks across the ages and to almost every society. Brief, memorable statements such that in *Analects* 1.3 are like candy for

personal growth narratives. Have substance; don't be shallow. "Just be serious, even grave," the advice seems to say. Resist the easy answers, and build a strong foundation of character and self-reflection. Don't make Faustian bargains with celebrity and short term gain.

- ◆ The real test will come as we see this initial advice play out in the course of the text. With these simple words, Confucius sets the bar very high for those in public life.

ANALECTS 1.4

- ◆ The fourth passage introduces one of the most important themes in the entire text of the *Analects*, and it is one of Confucius's most devoted students who speaks—Zengzi, or "Master Zeng." It stresses that proper conduct in itself won't do. Truly serious people must also examine their actions every single day. They should note their successes, to be sure, but they must above all reflect on where they failed to live up to their own standards.

.....

1.4

Master Zeng said, "I examine my person and conduct every day in three ways. First, in my interactions with others, have I done all that I can? Second, when dealing with friends and peers, have I managed to keep my word? Finally, have I reviewed and acted upon what I have learned?"

.....

- ◆ This fourth passage in the *Analects* shows that the book will not only be made up of the ideas of the Master, Confucius, himself. It will be a collaborative effort centered on Confucius's teachings, but multiple voices will speak throughout the text.
- ◆ The heart of Zengzi's message lies in self-reflection, and we will see the theme of continual reflection upon, and repair of, both self and society in the *Analects*. This theme goes well back in Chinese culture.

- ◆ Zengzi's genius here lies in bringing the concept of examination and repair to the level of the individual, and this key move would cast a very long shadow in Confucian thought over the centuries. Of course, it is not Zengzi's idea alone. But in the context of the *Analects*, it appears early and in Zengzi's words.
- ◆ Zengzi's words contains three related ideas. He asks himself daily about his interactions with others—has he done all that he can? Next, he reflects upon his dealings with friends and peers who are relative equals in terms of the social hierarchies of his day—has he kept his word? Finally, has he reviewed and acted upon what he has learned? These very questions would become a significant part of daily self-examination rituals practiced by later Confucians for 2,500 years.

ANALECTS 1.5

- ◆ The first five passages of the *Analects* are an effective miniature of the work as a whole, a wonderful introduction to a complex text.
- ◆ Entry five adds one more key element to this miniaturized tale. If the other four stressed individuals and social interactions, the fifth is about running the whole show. Confucius speaks again, as he has in *Analects* 1.1 and 1.3, and his topic now is how to run a state.

1.5

The Master said, "In leading a state of a thousand chariots, respectfully undertake your responsibilities and keep your word in all of your dealings. Be frugal in your expenditures, and care for others. Employ the working people in state projects only at the proper times of the year."

- ◆ Notice the focus of Confucius's examples. Above all, we see again the importance of keeping one's word.

- ◆ Frugality is another theme that Confucius, his pupils, and Confucian scholars through the centuries would emphasize, often to complete lack of interest on the part of the rulers they served. Notice how Confucius here links frugality and care for others. For Confucian thinkers, frugality, care for others, and keeping one's word were all of a piece.
- ◆ The ending is exquisitely poignant for those who have spent a great deal of time reading Chinese history—or, really, the history of any large polity or world empire. Confucius doesn't just leave his message at "frugality." He senses something that would be even more detrimental to ruling families than the social woes caused by spendthrift ways—such as building exquisite palaces, gardens, and terraces, or hosting lavish banquets that strain the treasury.
- ◆ According to Confucius, if a ruler took the rural farmers out of their fields to participate in what is called *corvée* labor—required work on behalf of the government—it needed to be in the agricultural downtime of the late fall and winter, if at all. To take farmers from their fields during planting or harvest was to endanger not only their lives, but the health of the entire state.

Suggested Reading

Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*.

Chin, *The Analects*.

Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*.

Lau, *The Analects*.

Leys, *The Analects*.

Questions to Consider

1. At the end of *Analects* 1.1, Confucius notes that one of the highest virtues is to be unknown, yet not resentful. Think about people or situations in which these words resonate.
2. In *Analects* 1.2, we learn that being an effective member of society begins at home. Many other thinkers have stated similar thoughts all over the world. Who are some of them?
3. In *Analects* 1.3, we hear that slick words and flashy appearance rarely lead to the highest levels of conduct. This, too, has been said all over the world. When and where have similar sentiments been voiced?

LEARNING TO READ THE *ANALECTS*

What we think of today as the “received text” of the *Analects* took many centuries to take shape. Tomb fragments that have been discovered—with the text still in flux—show a document four centuries old that still was awaiting “final” form. And even though there are really no absolute rules when it comes to the structure and patterning of the *Analects*, the observations in this lecture will help you to negotiate a chapter-by-chapter reading of the text.

THE ACCURACY OF THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ Readers of the *Analects* are well served by focusing on early chapters. The earlier you are in the text, the more likely you are to be reading selections that were composed in the century or so after Confucius’s death.
- ◆ There is nothing that we can do to change the basic fact that the *Analects* was written entirely by others. Not a word of it was written by Confucius. It is even unlikely that very much in the text we have today represents the memory of an actual student of Confucius’s who might be recalling a precise phrase decades after the sage uttered it.
- ◆ A core textual issue appears once we realize that a given passage from the *Analects* may have been written 10 years, 100 years, or even 300 years after the fact. Nevertheless, we should not assume without reflection that a document written 300 years after the fact is less accurate than one written, for example, 200 years after the fact. Both are so distant from

the original events that it would be a serious mistake to assume that date alone can help us.

- ◆ If we are going to understand what Confucius's *Analects* might teach us, we must come to terms with what it cannot. It cannot bring us face-to-face with Confucius's finest teaching moments. Instead, we must gain a nuanced understanding of what parts of the text that are nearer to the events are useful and what parts less so; what parts further from them are useful and what parts less so.
- ◆ There is a fair bit of evidence that the earlier chapters of the *Analects* tend to be some of the oldest. Scholars have spent a great deal of time parsing the materials with an eye toward understanding which materials might have been the direct, or close-to-direct, work of Confucius's actual followers and their own followers.
- ◆ A large number of scholars over the centuries have suspected quite strongly that chapters 4–8 (or 4–9) form a kind of solid working-core of the text, although not everyone agrees. The most general wisdom has been that the first 15 chapters are the oldest strata of text, and that the last five are an eclectic blend of early thoughts and later reflections, put together by followers of followers of followers (and beyond). Chapter 20, almost everyone agrees, could not have been written until many years after Confucius's death.
- ◆ For our purposes, we will divide the text this way: Chapters 1–3 form a kind of introduction, and chapters 4–8 comprise the core of what Confucius's own students wrote, albeit probably decades after the fact.
- ◆ Chapters 9–11 are among the most interesting in the entire text of the *Analects*. They cover in detail what Confucius was like as a person, and they provide, by far, the majority of *Analects* statements that do not begin with Confucius's own words ("the Master said..."). Most scholars think that these three chapters were written by a generation of students-of-students. These statements are bound to be more general. Whether they are less accurate is another question. We should not assume lack

of accuracy just because of temporal distance, although we should be careful.

- ◆ After chapters 9–11, There is a great deal of material left (fully half of the text). This material is a mix of statements beginning with “the Master said...” and more distant reflections. This last half is the hardest part of the *Analects* to study with any strong sense of where the material came from.
- ◆ Note that at the very end of each chapter, especially in the last nine chapters of the text, the last statement or two may seem to come from nowhere we have seen before. It is highly probable that several of the final items in *Analects* chapters are the work of eager writers who, many years after the *Analects* began to be assembled, decided to add their own thoughts to the material. Occasionally, they wrote about topics completely unrelated to the *Analects*. As a result, we should be wary, at the very least, about framing any grand arguments around only a chapter-ending string of text.

THEMES IN THE EARLY CHAPTERS

- ◆ If we think about chapters 1–3 as broadly introductory, we can begin to see several themes. In *Analects* 2.1, Confucius explains the broad principle of ruling with virtue. The ruler stays put; everything else orbits around that figure.

.....

2.1

The Master said, “To govern with excellence and virtue
(德) is analogous to the Pole Star; it resides in its fixed
place, while the multitude of stars encircle it.”

.....

- ◆ This entry in the *Analects* is a fine example of the way that Chinese cosmological thought merged with Confucius’s teaching. Some of the other schools of thought in Confucius’s era were interested in larger questions about how the universe operates and the role of individuals

and societies within it. Confucius himself was not especially interested in such ideas. He states at various points in the *Analects* his lack of desire to ponder questions far beyond the human world.

- ◆ Nevertheless, in describing how a ruler should rule with excellence and virtue, the analogy to the heavens is right there. Like the pole star, the ruler remains fixed in place, and the other stars—the whirlwind of life and politics—takes place around him. This idea of a fixed center of political authority is a powerful and persistent one in Chinese thought. It would be many centuries, however, before later Confucians would make a conscious move to link the *Analects* to a larger cosmology more directly.
- ◆ In *Analects* 3.1, Confucius expresses his disgust with powerful families in his own time. He is exasperated by the overreach of the Ji clan, who had usurped kingly and even imperial rituals and benefits for decades.

.....

3.1

Confucius said of the Ji clan, “Eight rows of eight dancers in their courtyard—if this conduct can be tolerated, what conduct cannot be tolerated?”

.....

- ◆ Chinese culture has, since ancient times, placed great symbolic significance in numbers, and eight rows of eight dancers—a unit of 64 dancers—had such a cosmological significance that it was permitted to be used only by the Zhou king himself. Confucius was offended by the Ji clan’s shameless appropriation of an imperial tradition. To Confucius, it signaled a fundamental lack of understanding of ritual in Zhou society that Confucius saw as the center of all governance.

ILLUSTRATIVE PASSAGES

- ◆ What follows are several passages from chapter 5 that illustrate the teachings and structure of the *Analects*. Examination of these passages will

give you a continuous sense of what you will find in the *Analects* when you begin to tackle it for yourself.

- ◆ In *Analects* 5.11, Confucius engages in a quite common practice of his—criticizing someone who is not participating in the discussion. More than a few entries in the *Analects* express a judgment of another person, and it is often a quite withering one. Confucius was not shy about rendering his opinion, and a pupil named Shen Cheng is the object of his derision here.

.....

5.11

The Master said, “I have never met a person who is truly unwavering.” Someone asked, “What about Shen Cheng?”
“Shen Cheng is insatiable in his desires; how could he be called ‘unwavering’?”

.....

- ◆ The commentaries on the *Analects* don’t tell us much about this pupil, Shen Cheng, but he quickly became known to centuries of students as “the acquisitive one.” Note in particular how Confucius links the positive trait of being unwavering—the Chinese character connotes an iron-like strength—with the negative trait of being insatiable. The latter undercuts the former.
- ◆ As a result of the human tendency to juxtapose entries that likely have little connection, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Confucius, in the very next entry, criticizes one of his students quite directly. Criticizing



students is a common theme in the *Analects*, and it seems to suggest pedagogical inflexibility on the part of the Master. Here, Zigong just isn't ready in the Master's eyes for the ideals he expresses.

.....

5.12

Zigong said, "I do not wish others to impose upon me,
just as I also wish not to impose upon others." The Master
replied, "Zigong, such lofty abilities are far beyond you."

.....

- ◆ Confucius's response is even harsher than it might sound in isolation, because Zigong here is echoing the kind of statement that his fellow student, Zengzi, made in *Analects* 1.4—that he aspires to a kind of daily self-examination. Zigong was simply channeling the sayings of his colleague and his teacher; but he is told in return that he is lacking. In the very next entry, however, Zigong is allowed to speak with authority.

.....

5.13

Zigong said, "We followers can gain much from the Master's
wide-ranging learning, and yet we hear little from him on
subjects such as 'human nature' or 'the Way of Heaven.'"

.....

- ◆ Except for the fact that we just saw him put in place by his teacher, Zigong sounds like he knows a great deal here in *Analects* 5.13. Indeed, Zigong speaks to the very reticence Confucius mostly had in speaking about human nature and the cosmos.
- ◆ Turning in *Analects* 5.14 to another disciple, the *Analects* describes Zilu as fearful about acting upon his learning without adequate knowledge.

.....

5.14

Upon learning something new, Zilu feared only that—
before putting the teachings into practice—he would learn
something further.

.....

- ◆ This seems to be the very picture of trepidation. However, a scan of the commentaries shows that for some interpreters, the passage was meant to be a relatively positive portrayal, and that the penultimate Chinese character in the last phrase should have been rendered “hear it again.” That changes the meaning quite dramatically.

.....

5.14

Upon learning something new, Zilu feared only that—
before putting the teachings into practice—he would hear
it again before taking action.

.....

- ◆ One way to look at Zilu’s fear here is that he would begin to hear the drumbeat of what he has learned to make himself and others better without doing anything about it.
- ◆ From this final example, but also the sequence of four entries in a key chapter, we can begin to perceive some of the challenges in reading Confucius’s *Analects*. Just one Chinese character—same pronunciation, but written differently (有/又)—changes a good portion of the meaning in this last entry. “Learning something more” becomes “hearing something again,” depending on which character is used. While most statements in the text don’t open themselves up to such a profound level of change, this should show the combination of rigor and creativity that is required to read the *Analects* well.

Suggested Reading

Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*.

Brooks and Brooks, *The Original Analects*.

Questions to Consider

1. How much trust can we put in eyewitness accounts?
2. Some texts have many versions and even many edits (from Confucius to Shakespeare, and on to James Joyce and even Harper Lee). What is the relationship between newer and older versions?

Lecture 8

CONFUCIUS'S STUDENTS: ZAI WO AND YAN HUI

While every entry in the *Analects* should be examined for the teaching dynamic between Confucius and his students, there is a cluster of passages that speak directly to the way that Confucius taught, his relationships with students, and the students themselves. Recall that Confucius spent well over a decade on the road before he returned to Lu in 484 B.C.E. and opened his academy. During those travels, he was accompanied by four students, core supporters who knew the sage best. You will learn about two of them in this lecture: Zai Wo and Yan Hui.

CONFUCIUS'S TEACHING METHODS

- ◆ One of Confucius's basic teaching methods was to begin by posing a question and then setting students to work on it. He was not afraid to be critical, and his standards were high. On the other hand, many passages in the *Analects* begin with a student or other individual making a statement (or asking a question) and Confucius responding. While a lesson can always be derived from these exchanges, they also offer wonderful insights into what Confucius thought of his students and vice versa.
- ◆ The social life of Confucius's school is very difficult to glean from the text of the *Analects*. We can get an occasional glimpse of students jockeying for position and favor (successfully and unsuccessfully) within the school and beyond—in the world of court life and administrative employment. These

glimpses can tell us a great deal about how the school functioned, even though no equivalent of a mission statement has ever been found.

- ◆ Confucius demanded discipline, but he was intensely creative. Confucius stated that he would not continue to teach a student who, after he revealed one-quarter of a problem, could not unravel the other three-quarters. He taught them how to think, and students needed to use all of their learning to craft solutions. In this, Confucius showed a suppleness that very few later critics understood. He was not a teacher of rigid structures, but rather one who tried to teach his students to use a solid foundation of learning to create solutions to complex problems.

Zai Wo

- ◆ Confucius had very little patience for sloth, as he perceived it. One of those diligent pupils who accompanied Confucius on his lengthy travels happened to take a nap one day. Confucius was reportedly so shocked by that behavior that he not only excoriated the student, but changed his entire attitude toward humanity.

.....

5.10

Zai Wo lay asleep during daylight hours. The Master said, "Decaying wood cannot be carved, and walls of dung cannot be troweled. With conduct this out-of-line, why should I even bother to scold him?" The Master continued, "When younger, I used to deal with others by listening to what they said and believing they would follow through on their words. Now, when dealing with others, I listen to what they say and then observe the actions they take. It is because of Zai Wo that I have changed."

.....

- ◆ Few offenses could rival the choice, at least in Confucius's mind, of sleeping when you could be using the precious few hours of available daylight to study. Wasted daylight was wasted life.
- ◆ Zai Wo comes off very badly here, but there are other passages that help to round out a bit more of his character. Few wayward students have borne anything like the centuries-long brunt of their teacher's anger the way that Zai Wo has. He clearly was devoted to Confucius, as he was with him for the better part of two decades. The following is a different look at a prickly and, at times, annoyingly interesting student.
- ◆ Probing some of the most important territory in the teachings of the *Analects*, Zai Wo asks Confucius how far one should go in the pursuit of consummate conduct. Here he seemingly sets a rhetorical trap for his teacher:

.....

6.26

Zai Wo asked, "If someone told a person of consummate conduct that there was another consummate person down in a well, should he go down after him?" The Master replied, "Why would he do that? The exemplary person can seek to help, but he cannot be ensnared; he can be deceived, perhaps, but not duped."

.....

- ◆ Confucius doesn't take the bait, but we can see that Zai Wo, despite his sleepy behavior in one passage, was, at once, a prickly personality, a persistent investigator, and a student devoted in his own way to his teacher.
- ◆ A fascinating figure fills mythological literature all over the world—from Europe to the Americas, throughout Australia, and all over Asia. It is that of the trickster. The term is a difficult one to define, but tricksters can almost always be seen as slippery figures who show more than occasional

glimpses of brilliance, even as they play at petty antics that often infuriate more storied and seemingly serious figures in the tales

- ◆ Zai Wo as trickster: If we can even begin to imagine such a thing, the *Analects* takes on a wholly new dimension that enters the realm of mythology. This is appropriate, given the enormous role that the text has played in Chinese history. If we can begin to think of Zai Wo as a linchpin in the *Analects*—even in the few passages in which he is present—we might perceive other figures in a more “mythistorical” dimension (a merging of myth and history) that is meant to teach larger lessons beyond the greatness or failures of individual human beings.

YAN HUI

- ◆ Confucius clearly had a favorite student—favorite by far—and that was Yan Hui, sometimes referred to as Yan Yuan. Confucius was ambivalent about almost every one of his disciples, but not Yan Hui. Yan Hui was the *crème de la crème*, and Confucius mourned his far-too-early death. In Chinese lore, there never has been a student who could match him.
- ◆ Teachers who are confident of their abilities, as Confucius surely was, rarely speak of a student matching them. However, while Yan Hui was still alive, Confucius’s pupil Zigong came to Confucius and asked what he thought about Zigong’s abilities. In one of the most memorable lines in the *Analects*, Confucius says, “You do not approach Yan Hui; neither of us approaches him.”
- ◆ Perhaps the best place to begin our examination of Yan Hui is with a retrospective comment about him that comes fairly early in the book, in chapter 6. Duke Ai of Lu, asks Confucius about learning. The term he uses is *haoxue*, and the two Chinese characters that convey it have taken on a power far beyond their ordinary meaning (which is simply “to like learning”) because of statements such as this one. They have come to mean a mixture of desire, yearning, hard work, and talent, all rolled together into one neat and seemingly simple concept.

6.3

Duke Ai asked Confucius, “Among your disciples, can any be said truly to love learning? Confucius replied, “There was one—Yan Hui. He truly was eager to learn. He did not let anger taint his interactions with others, and he never made the same mistake twice. Alas, his life was brief, and he died young. Now, no one I have encountered approaches Yan Hui’s desire to learn and improve.”

- ◆ We can see some of the things that Confucius valued in a student here. Love of learning was foremost, but notice what follows it. Confucius was a taskmaster; but he knew that people made errors. What he valued above all was learning from errors and not making the mistake again. On top of that, we see that Yan Hui kept his emotions in check. This passage is truly a framework for what Confucius valued in a student.
- ◆ The picture Confucius paints in his statements about Yan Hui contribute to an exemplary story of fortitude and persistence that has been admired all the way up to the present. It is not an easy path, and many students from Yan Hui’s time onward have given up long before they have even begun to approach Yan Hui’s dedication.
- ◆ When Yan Hui died, Confucius wept. His response was so far beyond the ritual propriety that he himself taught to others that his pupils were stunned. It is one of the most human elements in the entire text of the *Analects*.
- ◆ Confucius taught that there were strict ritual observances with regard to everything from mealtime etiquette and the simplest of village traditions to the proceedings of the loftiest courts of his era. And in the hierarchical world of Confucius’s Zhou dynasty, it was unseemly to express too much emotion upon the death of someone of lower rank. Nevertheless, Confucius mourned so intensely for Yan Hui that many of those around

him worried about his health—both mental and physical, as we would characterize it today.

.....

11.9

When Yan Hui died, the Master grieved, “Alas! Heaven has overwhelmed me! Heaven has overwhelmed me!”

11.10

When Yan Hui died, Confucius wept for him without restraint. His followers worried, saying “Master, you weep without restraint!” The Master replied, “I weep without restraint? If not for Yan Hui, then for whom would I weep without restraint?”

.....

- ◆ Not long after his extreme and seemingly sincere expressions of grief, however, Confucius appears to have returned to his ritual-observing, social-compartmentalizing earlier self.
-

11.8

When Yan Hui died, his father, Yan Lu, asked the Master for his carriage, hoping that it could be sold, and the money used to pay for an outer coffin for his son. Confucius declined, saying, “Whether talented or not, everyone speaks on behalf of a son. When my own son, Boyu, died, I provided an inner coffin, but could not afford an outer coffin. It was necessary that I retained my carriage, because—having held a rank just below the state ministers—it would not be appropriate for me to go on foot.”

.....

- ◆ This appears to be a rather rapid change of mood on the part of the venerable sage. We know enough about the intervals between death and funerary observances in early China to see that we are talking about mere days, not weeks or months. That is not a great deal of time to mourn intensely, reflect, adjust, and return to the solid core of ritual observance that defined Confucius's life.
- ◆ Giving up his carriage so that Yan Hui's father could provide an outer coffin would have created several levels of problems for Confucius. Not only Confucius realize that providing a pupil with an outer coffin exceeds by far what he could do for his own son, who also died young, but his own place in a shaky social order required that he ride in a carriage. Apparently, there were limits to Confucius's grief.
- ◆ We have a small handful of entries that seem to express Yan Hui's own voice. In a strict sense, of course, this is impossible, because Yan Hui died before Confucius and even Confucius's own words in the *Analects* had been pieced together by those who lived after him. Nevertheless, the entry that follows gives us a sense of Yan Hui the student, the scholar, and the idealist.

.....

9.11

Yan Hui sighed deeply, saying, "The more I turn my gaze upward, the higher it all appears; the more resolutely I bore into it, the more impenetrable it becomes. I look for it in front of me, yet suddenly it is behind me. The Master leads me step-by-step, beckoning me ever-forward; he broadens my learning in cultural matters, yet channels my thoughts and actions with ritual practice. Even had I wanted to quit, I would be unable to do so. When I feel that my talents are completely spent, it is as though something more towers above me. Yet even though I wish to follow after it, there is no way to bridge the gap."

.....

- ◆ In deeply human fashion, Yan Hui speaks here of striving, toiling, and even doubting himself. It is one of the most beautiful passages in the *Analects*, because it shows the formidable combination of learning, seeking, following, and being overcome with concern. It shows exactly why the Master found Yan Hui to be a truly special follower.

Suggested Reading

Chin, *The Authentic Confucius*.

Inoue, *Confucius*.

Questions to Consider

1. Confucius seemingly said that one of his students surpassed him. Think about situations in our lives in which we either acknowledge or celebrate people surpassing us. Why would someone who is already acknowledged as a leader celebrate one of his students surpassing him?
2. Think about tricksters—people who disrupt the normal functioning of social relations. How can they be useful in society?
3. Confucius experienced (according to the *Analects*) a sense of overwhelming sorrow when his follower Yan Hui died. How does unexpected loss affect individuals and groups?

CONFUCIUS'S STUDENTS: ZILU AND ZIGONG

You have already met Zai Wo and Yan Hui, two students who accompanied Confucius on his travels and who later studied with him at his teaching academy. In this lecture, you will learn about two other followers, Zilu and Zigong, who were also with Confucius during much of his long journey and afterward. As you study the entries in which each of them are mentioned, you will begin to get a picture of the lives and characters of these two core students.

ZILU

- ◆ Zilu is one of the most difficult figures in the *Analects* to characterize. A close reading of the passages in which he appears reveals him to possess a surprisingly nuanced character. In some passages, Zilu shows an ambitious streak, and Confucius more than occasionally attempts to slow him down. In other passages, however, Zilu exhibits a devotion to learning and the Way that belies the common characterizations of him as foolish and headstrong.
- ◆ The bulk of *Analects* passages featuring Zilu—more than two dozen in all—portray an individual who just might be in over his head in the refined and disciplined world of Confucius's academy. Yet there he remains, by Confucius's side, even as other disciples receive less thorough treatment.
- ◆ Confucius could be extremely critical of Zilu, and many of his fellow students were quick to follow the Master's critical comments and be

dismissive of Zilu. In the world of the *Analects*, Zilu has a rough-and-ready character:

- ◆ Consider the beginning of a long passage that seems tailor-made for gaining the goodwill of the Master. It seems almost to be a set-up, until Zilu quibbles and it all backfires. Zilu starts out by playing the role of gentle critic, only to be schooled by the Master.

.....

13.3..

Zilu asked, “If the ruler of Wei gave you management of his state, what would you do first?” The Master replied, “First, I would make sure that names and terms were used correctly!” Zilu responded, “You would do *that* first? Why such impracticality? Who cares about proper naming?”

The Master replied, “How can you be such a rube? Exemplary people seek guidance in issues they don’t comprehend. When names are not used precisely, communication is ambiguous. When language is ambiguous, affairs will remain unsettled. When affairs are unsettled, the channeling power of music and ritual conduct will wither. When music and ritual withers, administration of punishments will go awry and the people will be utterly confused. Therefore, when exemplary people give a name to something, it most certainly can be clearly articulated.

When clearly articulated, it can definitely be put into practice. When it comes to the use of language, there is absolutely nothing scattered or careless about the words of the exemplary person.”

.....

- ◆ In this passage, Confucius explains how entirely wrong Zilu really had it. If language is not used properly, ritual propriety will eventually fragment, music will not flourish, and eventually even laws and punishments will fall out of order. Confucius concludes with a scolding that seems directed as much at Zilu himself as future generations.
- ◆ The theme of Zilu-as-rustic may perhaps nowhere be seen more clearly than in a charmingly naïve scene when Confucius praises the wayward pupil—and the pupil is perhaps just a bit too happy with the situation.

.....

9.27

The Master said, “If there is anyone who would be unashamed to stand next to an official displaying apparel made from the fur of fox or badger, that person surely would be Zilu.” He quoted a line stanza from the *Book of Songs* to illustrate.

Not envious, not covetous

How could he not be good?

After hearing this encomium, Zilu recited the lines over and over. The Master chided him, “These brief lines—how is it that you make such a treasure of them?”

.....

- ◆ Confucius begins with warm praise, and finishes by undercutting it almost entirely. It is a lesson in the power of encouragement, to be sure, but also a fascinating window into the relationship between Confucius and one of his stalwart followers.
- ◆ Zilu’s actions can quite accurately be summed up as headstrong—whether he was engrossed in study or dreams of official employment.

Confucius himself often chastised Zilu for being foolhardy, and predicted that he would come to a very bad end.

- ◆ The *Analects* contains many negative remarks about Zilu, and it would be easy just to dismiss him as a crude and unreflective bumpkin. Such a dismissal would be a serious mistake, however: Zilu is as fascinating a figure as there is in the *Analects*, and precisely because his conduct is so wide-ranging (veering between going too far, as the Master noted, to his simple expressions of joy at Confucius's praise).

ZIGONG

- ◆ Zigong is another fascinating figure in the *Analects*. Unlike Zai Wo, Zilu, or even Yan Hui, Zigong knew how to elicit ever-deeper teachings from the master. He exhibited aspects of almost all of the positive qualities shown by his peers Zai Wo, Yan Hui, Zilu, and others. He listened intently, sought to put the teachings into practice, and was open to being criticized. But in one of the most famous entries in the *Analects*, Confucius called Zigong “a tool.” This is not meant in the idiomatic American English sense—the larger context combines “implement” and “vessel”—but it is almost equally problematic.
- ◆ Consider the following statement from chapter 2.

.....

2.12

The Master said, “The exemplary person is not a ritual vessel.”
.....

- ◆ This brief statement has puzzled interpreters over the ages. Some commentaries have stressed that the meaning of “ritual vessel” refers to an object used only for limited, special functions. Others have interpreted it in almost the opposite sense—the exemplary person is not a “tool.” Either way, imagine a reader's surprise when, three chapters later, the

following statement appears directly after Confucius praises another follower, calling that fellow an “exemplary person.”

.....

5.4

Zigong asked, “What do you think of me?” The Master replied, “You are a vessel.” Zigong asked further, “What kind of vessel am I?” “The Master replied, “A *hu* or *lian* vessel—specialized and precious, yet not meant to function in diverse circumstances.”

.....

- ◆ This exchange tells us much about both Zigong and Confucius. One way of reading Confucius’s second statement is that he let up a little, easing the wound of his first statement. Another reading considers such exchanges as taking place between an avid student and a critical, but caring, teacher—Confucius is not afraid to be tough on Zigong because he knows that he can take it.
- ◆ The three dozen Zigong entries in the *Analects* provide several more examples of Confucius taking his follower to task. Perhaps the most telling comes in chapter 3, when Zigong sought to cut a few corners in a significant ceremony.

.....

3.17

Zigong wished to abandon the almost defunct ritual practice of sacrificing a sheep at the New Moon ceremony each lunar month. The Master said, “Zigong! You begrudge the price of the sheep. I value the ritual as it is meant to be conducted.”

.....

- ◆ As every experienced reader of the *Analects* knows, ritual propriety takes precedence over considerations of cost, and mere accounting is no match for the requirements of an important sacrifice.
- ◆ The broad sweep of the Zigong entries shows a student who had a knack for teasing out the teachings of his mentor and perhaps even taking several of his fellow students down a notch.
- ◆ Zigong seemingly comes into his own in the later chapters of the *Analects*. Of course, there was only a very loose sense of narrative control exercised upon the *Analects*, and as you have learned, we know little about how it was crafted. Still, for the careful reader of the Zigong passages—especially when they are read as a unit—the student comes into his own, both as an articulator of ethical conduct and as a fierce defender of his teacher. In six consecutive passages from *Analects* 19.20–19.25, Zigong becomes the one who schools people who are just a bit too glib with their own words.
- ◆ Zigong, perhaps more than any of Confucius's core followers, showed distinct, even dramatic, growth in the actual unfolding of the chapters of the *Analects*. It is tempting to see the placement of these passages as a constructed narrative. It works well, however, to consider the matter loosely as the way in which a diligent student—and one who makes more than a few mistakes along the way—rises to become a teacher in his own right, never forgetting the skills imparted by his teacher.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTERS IN THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ We have now discussed four of Confucius's followers: Zai Wo, Yan Hui, Zilu, and Zigong. These four students were at least 20 and probably 30 or more years younger than their teacher. They made their ways on a long journey with Confucius, and all ended up back with him in his academy in Lu. All pushed the sage in directions that can teach us new things about the world of the *Analects* and about ourselves.
- ◆ The *Analects* passages containing the names of these four students amount to almost a quarter of the text; with Confucius himself, they

make up a strong plurality of entries. With their characterizations firmly in mind, you should now be able to imagine a distinct student-type for each of them. They will provide an anchor of sorts as the complexity of the *Analects* continues to unfold, but only if you work to use this information to understand the text.

- ◆ The key to grasping the multiple personalities in the *Analects* lies in mastering five figures—Confucius and his four most consistent (and often most ardent) followers. They form a small community of teaching and learning that will expand as you read.
- ◆ As you gain confidence in the subtleties of Zai Wo, Yan Hui, Zilu, and Zigong, the other characters in the *Analects* will begin to come to life in a way that does not happen if you simply read a cast of characters. Like the characters in a play, the personalities of Confucius's students come to life in action and around ideas that have shaped Chinese thought for 25 centuries.

Suggested Reading

Chin, *The Authentic Confucius*.

Inoue, *Confucius*.

Questions to Consider

1. Confucius had a tendency to put down his followers, even if he thought highly of them. What role (positive and negative) does a teacher's put-down play in education?
2. Zilu seemed bored by Confucius's emphasis on precise language in shaping government and society. Confucius is adamant about getting the language right. Is precise language important in our lives?

Lecture 10

CONFUCIUS ON THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING

Throughout world history, a certain kind of thinker has asked a persistent question: What is the purpose of learning? The question and its answers mattered intensely to Confucius, and he weighs in over the course of the *Analects* from many perspectives. This dynamic is part of what makes reading the received *Analects*, from beginning to end, a worthwhile practice.

THE EXEMPLARY PERSON AND THE PETTY PERSON

- ◆ In the *Analects*, the staccato pacing of themes concerning the purpose of learning seems like the pattern of a seminar with a gifted teacher. Consider the following passage about the relationship between learning and the larger world.

.....

13.5

The Master said, “If people can recite the three hundred items in the *Book of Songs*, yet still fail to make use of that knowledge when given an official position—or when sent abroad on diplomatic missions—what is the use of studying? Even though they have learned so much, what is the use of it to them?”

.....

- ◆ The text referred to in this passage is to one of the core works of the Chinese classics, the *Book of Songs*, which Confucius deeply admired as a source of wisdom. Without being able to bring one's learning into the hurly-burly world of action, Confucius says, mere study means little.

- ◆ Confucius believed that his teachings, which to his mind were the teachings of the ages, were meant to be put directly into practice. The Confucian school's belief was that its teaching was about the management of a harmonious society under heaven—that is, the essentially infinite realm of the Chinese state as it was conceived in Confucius's day.

- ◆ The purpose of learning in Confucius's world was service—more specifically, service in a hierarchically organized political structure in which rulers were replaced by eldest sons in the best of times and usurpers in the worst of them. Confucius believed that his era was on its way to the worst of times, and that only proper teaching of the *Book of Songs*, the rites, and music could stem the negative tide.
- ◆ Much of Confucius's personal frustration grew directly from his own inability to merge pure and practical learning, or to convince anyone to give him a position of importance that he could use to show just how effective his teachings could be. As much as he believed that careful study

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of the *Book of Songs* led him toward better service, he never had a real opportunity to show it. He hoped to do so through his students.

- ◆ Consider the exchange between master and disciple in the following passage, in which we see Confucius's nuanced and politically aware statement about how to bring one's character and teachings to the larger world.

.....

13.24

Zigong asked Confucius, “Everyone in the community admires a person’—what do you think of that saying?”

“That is not sufficient,” answered the Master. Zigong continued, “Everyone in the village despises a person’—what about that?” “It is still not sufficient,” answered the Master. He continued, “It would be far preferable if the community members who are good express admiration and those lacking in goodness despise him.”

.....

- ◆ This idealistic statement on the part of the sage is one of the most problematic in the *Analects*. To be admired by those who are “good” and despised by those “lacking in goodness” is fraught with problems in all but the simplest worlds of good and bad. Translating this statement to a world of political intrigue, power, and endless machinations (as in Confucius's own 6th–5th century B.C.E. society) makes the observation all but useless beyond those who have already bought into Confucius's worldview.
- ◆ Many critics considered Confucius's ideas to be hopelessly naïve. It is clear, however, that Confucius was adamant in his position. The very next passage presents a contrast that Confucius draws throughout the *Analects*: the exemplary person and the petty person.

.....

13.25

The Master said, “Exemplary people are easy to serve and difficult to please. Trying to please them with conduct contravening the Way will displease them. When employing others, they utilize them with an understanding of their capacities. Petty people are difficult to serve but easy to please. Trying to please them with conduct that contravenes the Way is little problem for them, yet when employing others, they hold unreasonable expectations and expect them to be good at everything.”

.....

- ◆ Confucius's phrase about the “petty people” does not refer to peasants, ordinary shopkeepers, or humble people (as Confucius himself was born) all over his world. Confucius's petty person is someone who is as talented as his finest students but is so self-absorbed, so focused on his own goals and needs, that he perverts what is good for society for his own ends.
- ◆ Consider the next passage, a much briefer and more pungent entry.

.....

13.26

The Master said, “Exemplary people are venerable but not haughty; petty people are haughty but not venerable.”

.....

- ◆ There are many more such passages. The contrast between the exemplary person and the petty person is a monumental one in the *Analects*, and it goes to the heart of Confucius's teachings about how he and his students needed to relate to the wider world.

THE WORLD OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- ◆ A large portion of the teaching messages in the *Analects* hover somewhere between discussion of individual character and matters of larger political attention. These messages teach us how to move from the principles which should be guiding us in our own lives to shaping the larger world around us.
- ◆ Consider the following exchange, which sums up the relationship between studying, reflection, and action. Those who overlearn Confucius's teachings often choose pondering over practice. Confucius disabuses his students of any such idea.

.....

5.20

Ji Wenzi thought three times before taking action. Upon hearing this, the Master said, "Twice is enough."

.....

- ◆ This brief entry is a beautiful rejoinder to those critics, in East Asia and the West, who wish to caricature Confucius as an endlessly dallying pedagogue, unable to muster the decision-making to accomplish anything in the real world.
- ◆ There are three consecutive passages in chapter 8 that are especially intriguing when it comes to thinking about the relationship between learning and public service. Recall that the larger point of learning in Confucius's view was to be prepared to serve. Confucius—and especially his follower Yan Hui—embraced the notion of personal growth, and the tradition that would become associated with Confucius made personal growth all-important. For the sage himself, however, the transition from personal growth to employment was especially tricky. Confucius wanted his students to be prepared to serve, but he didn't want them to be in too much of a hurry.

.....

8.12

The Master said, “Someone who studies for three years without turning attention to official employment and salary—this is not easy to find these days.”

.....

- ◆ Confucius’s reputation as a teacher, even in the small state of Lu 2,500 years ago, was enhanced when his best students joined the court and received an official salary. On the other hand, if they were not polished enough, real trouble could lie ahead, and one’s reputation could just as easily be tarnished.
- ◆ Confucius goes further in *Analects* 8.14.

.....

8.14

The Master said, “Do not involve yourself in official matters for positions you do not hold.”

.....

- ◆ Here Confucius cautions that students (and officials already holding positions) should focus on the present. Whether thinking about future positions leads to time-wasting or severe meddling, it is useless from Confucius’s perspective. Focus on your role, Confucius says. Keep in tune with the times and be ready for either frustration or advancement, but do not let thoughts of another position occupy too many of your present thoughts.
- ◆ Now consider the longer passage between these two brief gems of insight.

.....

8.13

The Master said, “Be deeply committed to love of learning and maintain, even unto death, the sterling Way (善道).
A state in turmoil should not be entered, and an agitated

realm is no place to reside. When a state possesses the Way, it is right to be celebrated, but when it does not, one should become a recluse. When the state possesses the Way, it is shameful to be poor and without position. When it does not, it is shameful to be wealthy and high-ranking.”

.....

- ◆ Confucius sets exceptionally high standards here. Those standards are both developmental and etched into the relationship between character and the times in which one happens to live. Challenging times call, in Confucius’s view, for a profoundly different relationship to employment than times when the world is one with the Way.
- ◆ In these three clustered passages, we see a relationship between learning and service that clearly does value the slow, day-by-day acquisition of knowledge. It is then placed against the potentially tumultuous times through which Confucius knew that future generations would live.

PROGRESS AND REGRESS

- ◆ Another fascinating three-passage sequence appears in chapter 9. The first of these passages shows that Confucius was well aware of the inexorable surge of time.
-

9.17

The Master stood at the bank of a river. “Isn’t the flow of life like this river—churning continually, day and night?”

.....

- ◆ Time passes, never ceasing, and human beings have to find their place in its great river. Confucius realized this, in the end, when he returned to the state of Lu in 484 B.C.E. and gave his last efforts toward teaching. It seemed to be a last gasp attempt to make a mark in a minor area, but it

is apparent that Confucius gave it what he had left. Yet the river rushed onward.

- ◆ It is difficult to keep one's focus on the river of time in the face of all the distractions in our lives. Confucius knew this well. In the following passage, he pinpoints a particular human frailty—often, if not always, a male one—that perplexed him when he saw talent in wayward students.

.....

9.18

The Master said, "I have not yet met a person more enraptured by the virtues of excellent conduct than [德] than by sensual beauty."

.....

- ◆ Confucius's doubts about both his students and the rulers of his age were dominated by what we might call "sexual distractions." He despaired of finding a person more enraptured by the virtues of excellent conduct than by sensual beauty.
- ◆ Now consider the last statement in this three-passage sequence from chapter 9. It states in succinct fashion the relationship between progress and regress and shows what Confucius thought we should be considering as we ponder our own futures.

.....

9.19

The Master said, "Just as in the example of building up earth to make a small mountain, if I quit one basketful short of my goal, I have stopped. And just as in the example of filling a trench with dirt to level it with the surrounding ground, if—having thrown in only one basketful—I continue, then I am making progress."

.....

- ◆ Most interpreters have interpreted this passage as reflecting Confucius's attitude toward constant learning and improvement. Although there is potential ambiguity in the phrasing, one point is clear enough: Stopping short is not an option for Confucius. Always making progress is the goal. And in a larger sense, Confucius was only beginning to get started in teaching how to fit progress and regress into the larger picture of a life well lived.

Suggested Reading

Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*.

Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Confucius speaks of putting things into practice. He states that no amount of study matters if a person can't make it work in the world. What is the relationship between studying and making a difference in the world?
2. Confucius emphasizes the contrast between the exemplary person and the petty person. His petty person is a smart and very capable individual who has not internalized the principles in which Confucius believes. What is the difference between exemplary and petty as you think about historical and present-day society?
3. Confucius states, in disagreeing with a follower, that thinking three times before taking action is too much. When is thinking thrice a bit too much?

FILIAL DEVOTION IN THE *ANALECTS*

This lecture and the seven that follow will delve into particularly significant items in the *Analects* that came to form the foundation for all Confucian thought in Chinese history. In this lecture, you will learn about the concept of filial conduct, a key conceptual element in the *Analects*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FILIAL CONDUCT

- ◆ No concept is more central to Confucian thought than the Chinese character *xiao*, which, depending on the circumstance, can be rendered as “filial conduct,” “filial devotion,” and even “filial obligation.”
- ◆ The core message of Confucius's teachings on how to behave in society is that devoted children or loyal followers labor on behalf of their seniors or superiors, but they also have a duty to correct them.
- ◆ An important notion in the study of childhood development is the idea that solid foundations are required before more complex thinking is possible. Consider the following entry in the *Analects* with this developmental idea in mind.

.....

1.2

Master You said, “Rare indeed is the person of filial and fraternal conduct who yet enjoys defying his superiors. And among those not inclined to defy authority, there has never been one who incited rebellion. Exemplary people focus upon the roots. Once the roots are established, the Way will grow and spread. As for filial and fraternal conduct, they are, I suspect, the root of all consummate conduct.”

.....

- ◆ If “filial and fraternal conduct” is the “root of all consummate conduct,” as this passage states, then it would appear that much more complex matters, such as benevolence, ritual propriety, and the higher virtues have their foundation in the conduct of family life.
- ◆ The Chinese character for “filial conduct” (孝) is instructive. On top is a fragment from the original character for “old” or “venerable” (老). Filial conduct pairs that seniority in the family (and beyond) with another element meaning “child” (子). That simple combination, in turn, leads to the Chinese character for “teaching” or “education” (教). This is the powerful idea behind the developmental focus of filial conduct. It begins at home, is honed in social roles within the family, and is carried on, in a deep educational sense, into the larger world.
- ◆ Confucius was once asked why he did not serve in government. This was more than occasionally a sore point with Confucius, who was frustrated by his failure to be recognized by rulers of his time. Early in the text of the *Analects*, however, he seems to reject the entire premise of the question centered on governmental employment.

.....

2.21

Someone asked Confucius, “Why are you not engaged in official service?” The Master replied, “The *Book of History* states, ‘Filial conduct lies precisely in being filial! One need only be filial in conduct with parents and siblings to engage in official service.’ By exhibiting filial conduct in my life, I am engaged in official service. Why must I be ‘engaged in official service?’”

.....

- ◆ According to this line of Confucian thinking, filial conduct connects directly with official service. Indeed, the core connection between running a family and running larger social and political bodies has formed, over the centuries, a strong line of political philosophy spanning early mythology to politics today.

THE CLASSIC OF FILIAL CONDUCT

- ◆ The message of filial devotion is most prominent in a text that features Confucius and his follower Zengzi—a slender book often translated into English as the *Classic of Filial Piety*. Many modern scholars are inclined to avoid the word “piety,” however, because it has been so thoroughly influenced by Western religious thought that it frames the meaning of the Chinese character (*xiao*) far too narrowly. We will therefore refer to this influential book as the *Classic of Filial Conduct*.
- ◆ Although it is a work created in the centuries after Confucius and Zengzi lived and taught, the *Classic of Filial Conduct* features these two prominent Confucians in its opening scenes, and their influence persists throughout its 18 brief chapters.
- ◆ The *Classic of Filial Conduct* was traditionally one of the first texts that children memorized, soon after learning their first Chinese characters. Even today, it is an influential text in and beyond China. It is relatively

simple and direct in language, but the *Classic of Filial Conduct* goes far beyond being a basic primer. The power of its themes fuel almost every lesson in Chinese government and politics.

- ◆ Consider the following excerpt from the *Classic of Filial Conduct*. Never was the classroom dynamic more evident in Confucius's lessons than it is here.

.....

Confucius was at repose in his residence, and Master Zeng (Zengzi) attended him. The Master said, "The former kings had the greatest excellence and the integral Way. With these, they brought calm to all under heaven and harmony to the people—above and below were without resentment...

Zengzi rose from his mat and spoke, "Your follower is not nimble of mind, and my understanding is inadequate. Could you elaborate?" The Master replied, "As for filial conduct, it is the root of excellence and the place where all education begins. Take your place again, and I will clarify it for you.

.....

- ◆ "Have a seat, and I will explain things to you" is the message that Confucius sends to his student. What follows is an explication that begins with the root of filial conduct and extends to the whole world.

.....

Your hair, your skin—your whole body—is acquired from your parents. You dare not do anything to harm it. Protect it—that is precisely where filial conduct begins. Set yourself aright, pursue the Way; advance your name for later ages, in order to honor your father and mother. These actions mark the completion of filial conduct. Therefore filial conduct begins with serving one's parents and family;

it reaches its middle in serving one's ruler; it comes to completion in setting oneself aright in the world.

.....

- ◆ The principle of filial conduct thus covers the entire range of human interaction, from the most basic interactions within the family to making one's way in the greater world.

THE CONFUCIAN SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE

- ◆ Consider the world that emerges from the *Analects* and related texts, such as the *Classic of Filial Conduct*. We will refer to this world as the Confucian symbolic universe. This phrase conveys the complex intersection of family life, government, and even the work of the heavens in people's lives.
- ◆ The Confucian symbolic universe amounts to more than a series of social and cosmic images. Family, society, government, and the cosmos were held together by a powerful moral bond—the bond of filial conduct. Filiality was the glue that held the cosmos and society together, from heaven down to the common people. It was a moral glue, linking people through a basic Chinese cultural ideal. It was an ideal that linked high and low, near and far; it was a bond that tied together the entire universe of human social relations.
- ◆ As we have seen, filiality is a term that, in the strict sense, relates to the family. It is the most basic link between people, connecting parents and children and elder and younger siblings. Because of its interpretive power, however, filiality can be extended metaphorically to many bonds between people, institutions, and ideas, giving otherwise impersonal relationships a profoundly moral dimension.
- ◆ The symbolism of social relationships in the Chinese classics is powerful precisely because it is founded on a solid relationship that was basic to Chinese society. The acts of venerating ancestors, ruling, tilling the earth, being a parent, a child, or both—all were placed in a moral framework. Thus, we have not merely filiality between a parent and a child, but filiality

within a hierarchical symbolic system in which the glue that holds it all together is that very filial conduct—a system with moral dimensions that gives a son a reason for working his father's fields and the subject a reason for obeying his sovereign.

- ◆ The model for the harmonious government and cosmos was the harmonious family. The government was the family writ large—the young, loyal and obedient toward the old, worked to preserve the common good (rank and ancestral rites within the family, harmony between high and low in government).
- ◆ In the Confucian symbolic universe, family and government are structured along similar lines. If a son proved to be capable within the family, his virtue could be transferred to government. Loyal to his sovereign, respectful of his father, deferential to his elder brothers, the filial son cultivated a proper decorum which served him well in his interactions within the Confucian symbolic universe.
- ◆ The family, with its myriad social relationships, was the model of the larger Chinese society and its governmental relationships of sovereign to subject, minister to minister, and so forth. Just as the father of the family served as the sovereign within his domain, the emperor acted as a father to the government, while simultaneously linking it to the cosmic realm as the Son of Heaven.



- ◆ These relationships, when combined, form a cultural theory of social order with the metaphysical underpinnings of a worldview. Everyone—even the Son of Heaven—owed respect to a higher authority. All people had others for whom they were responsible. Even relationships between relative equals were reconceived as hierarchical (elder and younger brothers, for example).
- ◆ Starting from the realities of the social world, filiality is a practical and symbolic way of dealing with these realities and creating an orderly society. Government models the family, family models the government—and both model the Way of Heaven.

Suggested Reading

Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*.

Rosemont and Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*.

Singer and Revenson, *The Piaget Primer*.

Questions to Consider

1. The *Analects* has a kind of developmental rhetoric that articulates how understanding certain concepts and developing skills build upon each other. In what other areas of life and learning is it necessary to grasp one skill before managing another?
2. In the *Analects*, Confucius often focuses upon the details of filial conduct. Think about deferential conduct in your own life. How much do the details of comportment matter in a social interaction?

CONFUCIUS ON THE VALUE OF REMONSTRANCE

In Confucius's *Analects*, the concept of remonstrance, or filial critique, exists as a built-in check for out-of-control authority. A bookend to the principle of filial devotion, remonstrance is intended to provide a necessary corrective—to stop the father from imperiling the family, for example, or the ruler from causing the ruin of the state. In this lecture, you will examine the nature of filial critique in China's hierarchical and network-driven society. You will also learn about the ways in which remonstrance appears and is more than occasionally crushed, even in a social and political system modeled on the teachings of the *Analects*.

UNDERSTANDING REMONSTRANCE

- ◆ Remonstrance (諫) is an important part of Chinese history, philosophy, and literature, and the concept lies at the very heart of Chinese social and political life.
- ◆ At its most basic, remonstrance is the duty of a child to correct the actions of an adult. Breaking the basic role of devoted child, that same child is obligated to teach straying adults something that they should already know. At its most dramatic, remonstrance is accompanied by images of fearless officials (sometimes dragging their coffins behind them in anticipation of their punishments) on their way to rebuke authorities who are set on paths to destruction.

- ◆ The concept of remonstrance is versatile, slippery, and enduring—albeit on a small scale and what might be called a minor chord. Consider the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary’s definition.

.....

remonstrance

1: an earnest presentation of reasons for opposition or grievance; *especially*: a document formally stating such points

2: an act or instance of remonstrating

.....

- ◆ Culture has a great deal to do with the way we view the word “remonstrance.” In English, we tend to look at it along the lines of “admonition” or “reproof.” But in East Asia, “remonstrance” has a distinctly hierarchical component. Partly because of its critical quality—of the kind that can harm friendships and make states totter—the cultural details matter a great deal.
- ◆ An early passage in the *Analects* speaks to the fine line at work for dutiful children who sense that their parents are following the wrong path. In this passage, we see the extraordinary care that Confucius exhibited with regard to the duty of remonstrance.

.....

4.18

In serving your father and mother, remonstrate with them, taking care to be gentle in the process. If, upon seeing that they wish not to follow your advice, continue to be respectful and do not contravene them. Do not be resentful, even if your frustration is difficult to bear.

.....

- ◆ “Do not be resentful” seems to imply that the remonstrance is over. This may not be Confucius’s point, however. Well-stated but demure remonstrance has a kind of persistence that, over time, changes families, communities, and the state.

REMONSTRANCE IN THE *CLASSIC OF FILIAL CONDUCT*

- ◆ The *Classic of Filial Conduct* (which Confucius is said to have compiled and edited) connects the concepts of filial conduct and remonstrance. The text gives an intriguing glimpse at what Confucius meant by the governing power of remonstrance.
- ◆ The structure of the *Classic of Filial Conduct* is remarkable. It lays out a vision of hierarchy as a natural process in the world, and it describes how filial conduct serves to give everyone important roles in society, no matter how large or small. After an introductory section, with Confucius playing a role every bit as central to the text as he does in the *Analects*, the *Classic of Filial Conduct* describes what filial conduct looks like from the perspective of every major group in Confucius’s society.
- ◆ Section 2 describes the filial conduct of the Son of Heaven, or emperor. Quoting another classic text, the *Book of Documents*, Confucius notes that “When this one person, the ruler, behaves well in serving his parents, the entire population will look up to his example.” For Confucius, the key to being in charge lies in serving one’s parents and setting an example for others to do so.
- ◆ From the ruler, the *Classic of Filial Conduct* proceeds toward the actions of hereditary lords, the ministers and high officials, on to the lower officials, and down to the common people, who themselves play a role in a harmonious society. In the excerpt that follows, Confucius describes the filial conduct of the common people and how society fits together with it.

.....
Making use of the cycles of nature, making the most of
the earth’s potential, being judicious in their actions, and

prudent in what they use—through all of these practices, the common people care for their parents. This, then, is the filial conduct of the common people. So it is that, from the Son of Heaven on down to the common people, filial conduct is without end or beginning, and no person should fear being unequal to its challenges.

.....

- ◆ While Confucius states the best case for harmonious social living through filial conduct, he did not forget that remonstrance is the key to correcting the small (and sometimes large) errors and imperfections that crop up when people live together.
- ◆ Section 15 of the *Classic of Filial Conduct* ("On Remonstrance") also packs some drama in its message. It begins with Confucius's follower Zengzi saying that he has learned deeply from the master on the subjects of parental love, reverence, respect, and maintaining the good name of the family. Then Zengzi asks the following question: "I wish to ask whether children can be considered filial simply by complying with everything their father demands." Confucius is so exercised by Zengzi's simple question that he repeats himself with a kind of exasperated sputter:

.....

The Master said, "What could you possibly be saying? What could you possibly be saying? In times before our era, if the Son of Heaven had just seven remonstrating ministers of government, although he lacked the Way, he would not lose *all under heaven*."

.....

- ◆ From there, Confucius digs into the picture of a full, flowing, remonstrating society—one that is held together by the very act of criticizing authority for the good of everyone.

.....

If leading members of the nobility had just five remonstrating ministers, although *they* lacked the Way, they would not lose their states. If high-ranking officials had even three remonstrating ministers, even though they lacked the way, they would not lose their extended families. If mere scholar-officials had but one remonstrating friend, they would not lose the regard of their peers. And if a father had a remonstrating son, even though he lacked the Way, he would not be mired in questionable conduct.

.....

- ◆ A society that is held together by the social glue of reverence and obedience to parents and leaders requires a system check. For Confucius, there is no possibility of a society—even a family—on autopilot. Course correction is a constant concern, and there can be no let up. People in authority need to learn to be attentive to these criticisms, to be sure. Nonetheless, Confucius puts the responsibility squarely on the child, the government official, or anyone who knows that the first responsibility is reverence and obedience, but such loyalty is tied at all times to the responsibility to criticize.
- ◆ Confucius concludes with a flourish.

.....

Hence, when the person who is senior engages in questionable conduct, a son cannot but remonstrate with the father, and a minister cannot but remonstrate with the ruler. When there is questionable conduct, there must be remonstrance. Following the father's wishes?—How could that possibly be considered filial conduct?

.....

- ◆ Remonstrating with people in authority is filial; it is obedience and loyalty for Confucius. There is no loyalty without correction.

REMONSTRANCE IN THE *ANALECTS*

- ◆ Remonstrance can be dangerous for individual critics, their peers, and even their families. During several periods of Chinese history, it was so dangerous that criticism led to certain death. In the *Analects*, Confucius is so sensitive to this concern that he sometimes seems to bury its potential in layer upon layer of meticulous couching of his rhetoric, personal demeanor, and action.
- ◆ In a passage three-quarters of the way through the text, Confucius warns that remonstrating children or officials must be aware of their own biases and must think carefully about whether or not they are offering critique for the greater good, not their own personal interests. It is necessary to exercise a kind of inner-reflexivity in the act of remonstrance that we see nowhere in the act of filial devotion.

.....

14.22

Zilu asked about serving one's ruler. The Master replied,
"Never deceive. Be completely upfront when admonishing
the ruler."
.....

- ◆ After hearing Confucius's admonition in *Analects* 14.22, all but the fiercest of critics might well be persuaded that it is better just to stand aside and let events take their course. This approach is entirely incorrect. In fact, for Confucius, it rises to a kind of moral wrong. In *Analects* 15.8, Confucius exhorts the reader to be vigilant and to critique authority when it is necessary.

.....

15.8

The Master said, “Not speaking with people who truly can benefit from your words is to let those people go to waste.

Those who are wise never let people go to waste, and yet neither do they squander their words.”

.....

- ◆ In other words, we are to pour ourselves into correcting the person who will listen and attempt to understand, but we are not to waste our energy on the person who is so dense as not to hear what we say. This is an enormous task. It is easy to see how difficult it could be, even in the somewhat idealistic pages of the *Analects*, much less the hurly-burly of political life in an ever-changing China. Minding your own business is not an option in the world of Confucius’s *Analects*.
 - ◆ If we read the *Analects* carefully, we will see that only the superior person is capable of correction. In fact, only the superior person is truly capable of filial conduct, even though the “easier” forms of devotion can proceed mechanically for many members of society. At its highest levels, filial conduct and correction are of a piece—and they are performed in the deepest sense of human beings fully attuned to their surroundings, soaking in all of the nuances of their situations. They carry out their devotions (and corrections) assiduously, and with a deft stroke that no mere technician ever could.
 - ◆ The most explicit statement of all concerning remonstrance comes very late in the *Analects*. In this passage, Confucius examines whether it is possible to work side-by-side with the petty person in the service of the ruler.
-

17.15

The Master said, “Can it be possible to work together with petty colleagues while serving one’s ruler? Before receiving an official position, all petty people worry about is that they might not be appointed. Once appointed, they are

apprehensive about losing their positions. And amidst all of that anxiety, they will stop at nothing to hold on.”

.....

- ◆ The key to filial conduct and remonstrance emanates from these points. One must focus entirely on the good of the organization, whether that is the family or state. Focusing entirely on oneself, as a petty person would, goes against both the ideal of filial conduct and the duty of remonstrance. Only by thinking about the larger context of social and moral networks can real progress be made.

Suggested Reading

Andrew and LaFleur, “Remonstrance.”

Rosemont and Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*.

Questions to Consider

1. The *Analects* emphasizes a duty for children (and junior members of a hierarchy) to correct parents and superiors. In what other parts of life do societies emphasize the necessity of correction?
2. Confucius emphasizes that correction of parents must be gentle—there are limits. Why do you think that he combines a duty to correct while urging that correction to be gentle?

Lecture 13

THE EXEMPLARY PERSON IN THE *ANALECTS*

Building upon the foundation of filial devotion and the duty of remonstrance, a series of key concepts in the *Analects* cluster together to round out the whole person. These additional concepts unify the foundation and foster in serious learners the skills that will result, with careful study and practice, in the highest level of Confucian practice. In this lecture, you will examine several concepts that help complete the individual—one who is capable of truly becoming an exemplary person.

LOYALTY

- ◆ The concept of “loyalty,” or “exerting all of one’s effort,” (忠 *zhong*) is a complex amalgamation of devotion to authority and steering that authority toward proper conduct without fail. There is nothing simple (or order-following) about it. For that reason, the English word “loyalty” is problematic. It is not the best translation into English of what really is going on in the text of the *Analects*.
- ◆ The Chinese character itself is composed of two elements—“middle, center” (中) above and “heart-mind” below (心). This character, which Westerners have translated as “loyalty,” is closer to something like “piercing the center of emotion and thought” (忠). It can also be translated as “exerting all of one’s effort.” This concept represents a powerful form of loyalty to the teachings that every serious Confucian learner shared.

- ◆ In chapter 4 of the *Analects*, Confucius makes a remarkable statement. It is even more surprising because it is embedded in the middle of the text. He tells Zengzi, his devoted follower, that a single idea connects all of his teaching.

.....

4.15

The Master said, “Zeng! My Way (道) is held together by a single strand.” Master Zeng replied, “Yes, certainly.” When the Master had departed, the followers asked, “What did he mean?” Master Zeng said, “The Master’s Way lies in exerting all of one’s effort (忠) and relating to the needs of others (恕). That is all.”

.....

- ◆ In this passage, “exerting all of one’s effort” is tied to another powerful concept—reciprocity, or relating to the needs of others. It is in statements such as this that we can begin to see the evocative power of Confucius’s teachings. Far from blind devotion to authority, the concept of exerting all of one’s effort is further tied to sensing the needs of others.

SINCERITY AND TRUST

- ◆ The specific Chinese character for “sincerity” (誠 *cheng*) is rarely mentioned in the *Analects*, but it bubbles beneath the surface and would, in time, explode into prominence generations after the *Analects* became cemented in Chinese education and political life.
- ◆ “Trust,” or “standing by one’s words,” (信 *xin*) is an allied concept that expects proper conduct from others, even as you seek to do right by them. Few concepts in Confucius’s *Analects* carry more weight.
- ◆ The concept of *xin* is all about interactions with others. The personal dimension remains significant, to be sure; without the moral bearing of the inner person, there can be no trust, no being true to one’s word. Yet

trust manifests itself in profoundly varying ways that go so far beyond the individual that it threatens to break the bonds tying it to a limited vision of the phrase “trust me.”

- ◆ Consider the following passage from the *Analects*, in which Confucius implores his student Zizhang to be true to his word for the good of the greater community.

.....

15.6

Zizhang asked about making one’s way in the world. The Master replied, “If your words reflect your devotion and you stand by those words—and if you are diligent and respectful as you proceed—then even though you might live in the faraway states of Man or Mo, your behavior will be proper. If, by contrast, your words do not reflect your devotion and you are not true to those words—and you are not diligent or respectful as you proceed—then even in your own home area, how can you proceed? When you take your position, keep these ideas right in front of you; when riding in your carriage, see them right before you. Then, and only then, will you make your way properly in the world.” Zizhang wrote this phrase on his sash as a reminder.

.....

- ◆ Note that “being true to one’s word” is linked closely to “exerting all of one’s effort,” which is a far cry from the traditional translation for *zhong*, “loyalty.” Throughout the *Analects*, these two concepts are tied closely together. Exerting all of one’s effort and being true to one’s word are both intimately linked in a kind of relational ethics that makes the entire social fabric stronger. For Confucius, there is never an “I” or “me” without an “us.”

VIRTUE

- ◆ “Virtue,” or “excellence,” (德 *de*) is a social concept, not merely one of individual character. As Confucius states in the *Analects*, “Virtue is never alone; it always has neighbors.”
- ◆ The English word “virtue” is a pretty good translation of *de*, and it is one that helps us on our path toward rounding out the full person in Confucian thought. But “virtue” is too closely mired in an individualistic worldview that fails to comprehend the profound social dynamics of Confucius’s teachings in the *Analects*. A better translation for *de* is “excellence.”
- ◆ Consider the following passage, in which Confucius is asked about the opposite of virtue or excellence: shameful conduct (恥 *chi*). The passage includes the concept of the Way, which, as we have seen, is an ancient Chinese notion that Confucius wove into his own teachings.

.....

14.1

Yuan Si asked about shameful conduct. The Master replied, “When the state possesses the Way, to receive an official salary is expected. Yet to receive a salary when the state has lost the Way—that is shameful.” Yuan Si inquired further, “If people refrain from attacking others—as well as from boastfulness, rancor, and covetousness—can they be considered to be consummate people?” The Master replied, “It is possible, but it would be difficult. Even so, I do not know if it rises to the level of ‘consummate conduct’.”

.....

- ◆ Knowing when and how to engage and to disengage lies at the heart of excellence in conduct. When the Way prevails, people of excellence need to serve. Confucius strikes this theme even more powerfully in chapter 8.

.....

8.13

The Master said, “Be deeply committed to love of learning and maintain, even unto death, the sterling Way (善道). A state in turmoil should not be entered, and an agitated realm is no place to reside. When a state possesses the Way, it is right to be celebrated, but when it does not one should become a recluse. When the state possesses the Way, it is shameful to be poor and without position. When it does not, it is shameful to be wealthy and high-ranking.”

.....

- ◆ It would be a mistake to read Confucius's statement as one of pusillanimous concern for safety. His point is easy to miss for a modern reader. It would seem that Confucius takes poor government as a reality, and he cautions the person who loves learning and serves with diligence to persevere. That same person should not sell his integrity, however. Knowing when to serve and when to retire gracefully is one of the most important skills of all in a dangerous political universe.
- ◆ Both excellence and virtue are profoundly social. Neither ever stand alone, even though one might cultivate one's skills in relative isolation and develop an inner core of strength. To make a difference in the world, one must work with others.
- ◆ Fostering excellence among his peers and followers was not easy for Confucius, and he more than occasionally voiced his frustration. Some of the best known entries in the *Analects* show an exasperated Confucius chiding humanity for its inability to reach for excellence.

.....

5.27

The Master said, “I am exasperated! I have not yet met the person who, when faced with his own errors, takes himself to task and looks deeply at his own conduct.”

6.29

The Master said, “Proceeding through life and society by exhibiting balance and proportion in all matters—is this not the way to true excellence? It has been a long time since such conduct was common among the people.”

.....

- ◆ Part of Confucius’s teaching strategy was to describe key concepts and skills in terms of their opposites. This power of negative example has a long tradition in Chinese history, and Confucius was a master of it. Some of the most memorable examples in all of education are those entries in the *Analects* that tell us how badly things might go astray. In the following passage, Confucius warns that virtue and excellence can be undermined.

.....

15.27

The Master said, “Glib words impair the virtues of excellent conduct (德). If people are incapable of handling small matters, grand plans will come to ruin.”

.....

- ◆ There is a two-pronged attack at work here. Glib words soak in and create fissures, like frozen water in a tiny sidewalk crack. They are one of the sources of discord. But the second issue makes for an odd pairing: Don’t be incapable of handling small matters, either. It’s almost as though the message is “think big, but soak in the details, too.” If you know anything about the way the best diplomats are trained all over the world, it sounds

very much like Confucius's advice—grand plans and small matters, all at the same time.

EMPATHY

- ◆ For Confucius, the core concepts of the *Analects* fit together to round out the whole person. This is always a matter of combining focus on individual capability and action in the world. Rounding out the whole person begins with filial conduct and the obligation to critique those in authority. It is completed by mastering the core actions of exerting all of one's effort, being true to one's word, and cultivating excellence.
- ◆ Let's take another look at a passage we explored at the beginning of this lecture.

.....

4.15

Master Zeng said, "The Master's Way lies in exerting all of one's effort (患) and relating to the needs of others (恕).

That is all."

.....

- ◆ What is "relating to the needs of others" (恕 *shu*), and why does it figure so powerfully in Confucius's vision? The English word "empathy" is a relatively close fit with the Chinese term, but think of it as less about the character of the individual feeling it than the entire social network creating mirrored patterns of empathy among a large group of people. Relating to the needs of others is a profoundly social matter.
- ◆ Empathy is driven by changing situations. If social and political life were unchanging, we could probably just memorize a list of rules. Yet we all know that life is much more complicated than that. Comprehending the particular situations people face requires an ability to empathize with the details of other people's challenges.

.....

5.23

The Master said, “Bo Yi and Shu Qi did not harbor old resentments. Because of this, they did not stir the anger of others.”

15.24

Zigong asked, “Is there an idea that can be put into practice throughout one’s life—to the end of one’s days?” The Master replied, “There is relating to the needs of others (恕)—do not demand of others anything that you are not prepared to accept.”

.....

- ◆ These passages give an indication of the range of possibilities when empathy or reciprocity shape the whole person—and society. Sensing deeply the challenges—and even the joys—of others frames Confucian ethical teachings in profound ways, and it reminds us that all ethical behavior is ultimately about connecting individuals with the rest of society.
- ◆ Empathy helps tie together the concepts we have studied—doing one’s utmost, standing by one’s word, and virtue, or excellence. In powerful ways, they are individual skills that need to be honed one by one. For the whole person to come to fruition as a social and even political being, however, they all must come together. Once they do, one can focus one’s efforts on attaining that highest of Confucian skills, consummate conduct.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Van Norden, *Confucius and the Analects*.

Questions to Consider

1. Many terms in the *Analects* are difficult to translate clearly into English. The challenge is not just limited to Chinese. Think about words in English that are challenging to explain to others. Regional usages are among the most fascinating of these.
2. One of the challenges of reading the *Analects* is the way that terms have changed over time (in China and beyond). Think of words that have changed in the course of your own lifetime.
3. Virtue doesn't stand alone in Confucius's estimation. Think about ways in which conduct (good and bad) spreads beyond an individual to affect others.

CONFUCIUS'S IDEAL: CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

In this lecture, you will begin to examine the complex but vitally important subject of consummate conduct, the most difficult and important of all of Confucius's concepts. Indeed, it is the most difficult of all concepts in Chinese philosophy. The topic of consummate conduct has dominated learned commentaries for 25 centuries in China and for as long as there has been a Confucian tradition in Japan and Korea. It is a concept that reveals the true depth of Confucius's teachings and firmly negates the claims of his critics.

THE BASICS OF CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

- ◆ The character that represents “consummate conduct,” *ren* (仁), is a vertical line just to the left of two short horizontal ones. It has the appearance a person standing next to the number two. It's pronounced in exactly the same way as the character for “person,” but the character for consummate conduct has an intriguing extra dimension that suggests surrounding humanity. In fact, human relations are what consummate conduct is all about.
- ◆ “A person standing next to the number two” is actually not very far away from the original etymological entries for the term in early Chinese encyclopedias. To reinforce this idea, think about the concepts that we have studied up until now. Personal conduct is tied to social action in the world. There is no room in Confucius's teaching for lone wolves who just do their own things.

- ◆ Many Western writers have translated this important character as “benevolence.” Others have rendered it “humanity,” and one mid-20th century scholar called it “man being at his best.” Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont translated it as “authoritative conduct” in their 1997 translation of the *Analects*. A decade later, Roger Ames revised his translation to the “consummate person” or that person’s “consummate conduct.”
- ◆ No concept in Confucius’s text is spoken of so frequently, and with so much depth, as consummate conduct. What follows is the first passage in which it appears in the *Analects*. Note the way that many of the concepts we have studied appear in this passage, as though building toward consummate conduct.

.....

1.6

The Master said, “As a younger sibling, be filial when at home and, when outside the home, defer to elders. Be cautious with language and keep your word. Show care for the multitude of people, but exhibit particular affection for those who are consummate in the way they conduct themselves. If any strength is left, engage in study to make yourself even better.”

.....

- ◆ Filial conduct and attention to deference (an aspect of filiality) build toward making good on one’s word. From there, Confucius’s idea spreads outward to the larger society. His final comment is just the kind of teacherly-ironic observation that can make a classroom great—if you have any energy left, devote yourself to further study.
- ◆ For Confucius, consummate conduct is deeply entwined with practical situations that face us every day. Consummate conduct is something we do, not an abstract principle meant only for discussion among a few intellectuals.

- ◆ One of Confucius's most generalizable statements about consummate conduct is also one of the most specific. In this passage, we see that consummate conduct is situational. Circumstances matter.

.....

4.5

The Master said, "Wealth and the recognition of others—these are what people desire. But if they are attained by diversions from the Way, they are not worth having. Penury and low position are what people disdain, but if they are a result of maintaining the Way, they should not be shunned. How could an exemplary person who deserts consummate conduct be worthy of the name? Exemplary people do not abandon consummate conduct for even the time it takes to eat a single meal. When distressed they move toward it; when anxious they move toward it."

.....

- ◆ Not for the space of a single meal does the consummate person avoid the highest forms of conduct. In good times and in bad, it is always there. The concept is about acting in the world; it is deeply situational. Personal integrity is central (Confucius was fond of noting this), but that integrity always merges with specific situations.
- ◆ Consider the idea of practical mastery, a concept explored by the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. Practical mastery is a mastery of situations, which can be as simple as shaking hands (or bowing) as one meets an acquaintance on the street to planning an elaborate celebration for family and community. Bourdieu's practical mastery is akin to Confucius's consummate conduct, but for one dimension, which we must not ignore: Confucius's points about consummate conduct are distinctly moral.
- ◆ Knowing just how to act in complex situations is a central element in Confucius's teachings. But it must be tied to a kind of shared (and

profoundly social) integrity that every proper Chinese schoolchild has been learning almost since birth.

- ◆ Confucius's interaction with his best student, Yan Hui, gives us a clearer picture of what Confucius meant by consummate conduct.

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12.1

Yan Hui asked about consummate conduct (仁). The Master replied, "By channeling one's energies and focusing upon ritual practice—that is how people become consummate in their conduct. Even if for only one day they channeled their energy and focused upon ritual practice, everyone and everything would come to be influenced by such consummate conduct. Becoming consummate in one's conduct comes from deep within a person; how could it come from the outside?"

Yan Hui said, "Could you elaborate upon the details?" The Master replied, "Do not *observe* beyond the parameters of proper ritual conduct. Do not *listen* beyond the parameters of proper ritual conduct. Do not *speak* beyond the parameters of proper ritual conduct. In short, do nothing that contravenes proper ritual conduct." Yan Hui replied, "Although I am not terribly perceptive, I shall earnestly put into practice what you have stated here."

.....

- ◆ The whole empire would bend if one were able, for the space of a single day, to follow through with the kind of consummate drive that would move social and political mountains. But mastery is required.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

- ◆ Late in the *Analects*, Confucius's occasionally prickly student, Zigong, asked the master about the practice of consummate conduct. Confucius made clear that a craftsman must sharpen his tools, and that he must master his craft. This included making the right kind of friends and a particular kind of learning.

.....

15.10

Zigong inquired about consummate conduct (仁). The Master replied, “Artisans wishing to polish their skills must first sharpen their tools. While living in any given state, serve the ministers of most worthy character (賢) and befriend those scholar-officials who are most consummate in their conduct.”

.....

- ◆ Sharpen your tools. It is not much of a stretch for us, 25 centuries later, to interpret this as a honing of one's skills. Confucius seems to be saying here that honing one's skills requires choosing the right people to be around—that we should find the “right” employers and make friends with people who will make us better.
- ◆ To develop consummate conduct, it is necessary first to develop the core skills that come before this higher-level one (filial conduct, remonstrance, exerting all of one's effort, being true to one's word, excellence, and relating to the needs of others). After that, the only way to keep improving is to study and learn from others.
- ◆ Immediately preceding Confucius's statement about broadening one's friendships is a broad and encompassing statement that seems to bury the one that comes after. What's important to grasp is that consummate conduct isn't just a lifestyle choice for Confucius. It's life or death.

.....

15.9

The Master said, “As for steadfast scholar-officials and people of consummate conduct, they would never jeopardize their consummate conduct, even in order to save their lives. Indeed, they might rather sacrifice their lives in order to attain it.”

.....

DEFINING CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

- ◆ Nowhere in the *Analects* is consummate conduct defined. For the reader with experience in Western philosophy, the lack of definition is nothing short of exasperating.
- ◆ The most famous definition of consummate conduct was proposed in the 11th century C.E., 16 centuries after Confucius lived, by one of the great minds of Confucianism. The scholar Cheng Hao boiled consummate conduct down to four Chinese characters:

.....

仁者天也

“Consummate conduct; it is heaven.”

.....

- ◆ If this definition is puzzling to you, join the crowd. It takes a lifetime to gain mastery of the nuances of what Confucius means by consummate conduct. And for the dearth of definitions in the text, there is no shortage of grand statements.
- ◆ There is little doubt that Confucius felt that consummate conduct was the center of all Confucian teachings. Consider another sequence of entries later in chapter 15.

.....

15.35

The Master said, “Consummate conduct is more crucial for the common people than even the fire and water they use every day. People have been known to die when encountering fire and water, yet no one has ever died when encountering consummate conduct.”

.....

- ◆ In this puzzling entry (which has been interpreted in diverse ways over the years), Confucius speaks to the implications of consummate conduct for the people themselves. He is still speaking to the learner who is likely to serve as an aide to a ruler (or the ruler himself). Like the idea he expresses of excellence, Confucius seems to feel that consummate conduct will radiate outward to affect everyone in the larger society.
- ◆ Consummate conduct is so important that even a particular kind of remonstrance might be required to achieve it.

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15.36

The Master said, “In always conducting oneself consummately (仁), do not give way—even to your teacher.”

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- ◆ Do not give way if somehow even your teacher diverts you from consummate conduct, Confucius says. But there is much more to learn about this complex concept.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*.

Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation*.

Questions to Consider

1. Practical mastery of situations is one of the skills that Confucian education emphasizes. Think of ways in which you or others have exhibited practical mastery in social situations.
2. Cultivation and maintenance of skills is a central theme in the *Analects*. How do you keep getting better at skills in your own life?
3. Can society be transformed by an individual's character? Confucius clearly thinks so. In what ways can you see evidence for (and against) this characterization?

CONFUCIUS ON CULTIVATING THE SOCIAL SELF

Consummate conduct is one of the central concepts in Confucius's *Analects*, and it is never far from Confucius's thoughts or those of his followers. A closer look at this important concept will reveal that consummate conduct is made up of a wide variety of smaller social and moral skills. Putting them all together and keeping them attuned requires a kind of social and moral virtuosity that few people can attain. To Confucius's mind, however, serious people should always be working toward this distant goal.

COMPONENTS OF CONSUMMATE CONDUCT

- ◆ The closest thing in the *Analects* to the all-important Confucian concept of consummate conduct appears in just one entry in the text. It occurs toward the very end of the work, and that is likely because Confucius and his followers never seemed to think of it as a definition. Rather, this passage was another way of explaining a challenging idea with an example.

.....

17.6

Zizhang asked Confucius about consummate conduct. Confucius said, "People who can put into practice five things in the broader world can be considered to be consummate in their conduct." "What are these five things?" asked Zizhang. Confucius replied, "Respectfulness,

magnanimity, being true to one's word, a nimble mind, and generosity." If people are respectful, they will avoid humiliation. If people are magnanimous, they will influence others. If people stand by their words, others will come to rely on them. If people are nimble of mind, they gain success. And if people are generous, they will have the ability to make full use of other's talents."

.....

- ◆ Confucius is stating that all of the skills required to round out the whole person are required to create a truly consummate person. It is a developmental process that requires filial conduct and remonstrance. From there, it builds toward exerting all of one's effort, being true to one's word, and exhibiting excellence in conduct. In this passage, we see that these skills might well build toward an even higher level that encompasses all of the other skills—consummate conduct.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

- ◆ Confucius and his followers understood the need for maintenance of the skills that make up consummate conduct. In fact, they had several words for this process: maintenance, repair, self-cultivation, reflection, study. All are geared toward leading the serious person toward consummate conduct.
 - ◆ Consider one of the first passages in the *Analects*, taking note of the way that the personal skills discussed previously come together in daily reflection.
-

1.4

Master Zeng said, "I examine my person and conduct every day in three ways. First, in my interactions with others, have I done all that I can? Second, when dealing with friends

and peers, have I managed to keep my word? Finally, have I reviewed and acted upon what I have learned?"

.....

- ◆ Daily reflection is the heart of personal maintenance and the beginning of any serious attempt to improve as a person. Zengzi assessed his conduct, reflected upon it, and made plans to hone his actions the next day. In another passage, Zilu, Confucius's headstrong follower, seems to bait Confucius on this subject.
-

14.42

Zilu asked about exemplary people. The Master replied, "They cultivate themselves by channeling their respectful behavior." "Is that all?" Zilu asked. "They cultivate themselves by bringing calm to their colleagues," answered Confucius. "And is that all?" continued Zilu. Confucius concluded, "They cultivate themselves by bringing calm to the people—even a sage king such as Yao or Shun would be challenged in that regard."

.....

- ◆ In this passage, we see the deeply social message conveyed in the *Analects*. While cultivation is focused on personal growth, much more is required. People who cultivate their skills ultimately help to create a society in which people interact harmoniously. It is about both the part and the whole—the individual and society—all at the same time.

STUDY AND REFLECTION

- ◆ Late in the text of the *Analects*, Confucius states that just a few more years of life and study would bring him to a new level. Even near the end of his life, he still perceived himself as an unfinished project. But he seems confident that further study would be the solution.

.....

7.17

If several years were to be added to my lifespan, I will have spent fifty years of study in all. And if that happened, I might then be free of serious errors.

.....

- ◆ Confucius states that he comes up short, but it is not difficult to see a message of constant and never-ending assessment and improvement at work for him in this passage.
 - ◆ Learning from others lies at the heart of ongoing education. In one of the most famous passages in the *Analects*, Confucius states that one can always learn when walking with others.
-

7.22

The Master said, “Even when walking in a group of three companions, I will surely find instruction. I select what is positive from them and pursue it. I reflect upon what is negative—inwardly correcting similar negative qualities I might have.”

.....

- ◆ We can learn from positive behavior, and we can learn from negative behavior. The deep learner is always learning, always acting, and always learning some more.
- ◆ In a peculiar passage at the end of chapter 17, Confucius discusses what happens when learning from the words of others, intense personal reflection, and exerting oneself to put it all into practice doesn't seem to work.

.....

17.26

The Master said, “For the person who reaches forty years of age and still bears the enmity of his peers—it will remain that way to the end of his days.”

.....

- ◆ Confucius strikes a disturbingly bleak note here. Confucius expects, it seems, that people who are on track with personal and social development will have achieved at least a toehold in society by the age of 40.
 - ◆ In the following passage, Confucius makes one of his broadest statements about how the developmental process should work.
-

2.4

The Master said, “By the age of fifteen, I had set my heart-and-mind upon study and learning. At thirty, I took my place in the larger society. By the age of forty, I was no longer overcome by doubt. At fifty, I had come to understand the way of heaven. By sixty, my ear was attuned, and from the age of seventy, I could give my heart-and-mind full rein without going astray.”

.....

- ◆ Confucius explicitly describes a detailed progression. At 15, his heart-and-mind was set upon study. From here we begin to see the profoundly developmental teachings of the *Analects* unfold.
- ◆ Confucius knew that making oneself better at handling the demands of a complex society with aplomb required a balance of learning and reflection. Without that balance, trouble ensues.

.....

2.15

The Master said, “Studying without reflecting leads to deception; reflecting without studying leads to peril.”
.....

CONSUMMATE CONDUCT AND THE EXEMPLARY PERSON

- ◆ Being true to one's words is not the end of the story for Confucius when he assesses a person's conduct.

.....

11.21

The Master said, “If people are serious and ardent in their social interactions, a question still remains—are they exemplary people (君子) or just putting on appearances?”
.....

- ◆ Confucius introduces here the idea that a person can be insincere—only appearing to act with integrity. In other passages, he makes clear that such insincerity is one of the great problems of leadership in his era, and that constant vigilance is required to exercise and interpret truly consummate conduct.
- ◆ Confucius also warns about the dangers of petty conduct. In the following passage, he links this danger explicitly to the underside of holding office.

.....

6.13

The Master said to Zixia, “You surely wish to become the kind of scholar and official who stands out as an exemplary person—not the kind that is a petty person.”
.....

- ◆ Don't be a petty official, Confucius says; be better than that. The contrast between exemplary and petty is so stark in the *Analects* that it seems to set out a rudimentary curriculum for consummate conduct.
- ◆ One of Confucius's most sweeping comments about consummate conduct states that exemplary people learn broadly of culture, discipline this learning through ritual propriety, and do not stray from that course.

.....

6.27

The Master said, "Exemplary people learn broadly in cultural matters. Moreover, they discipline themselves by observing standards of ritual conduct. By doing these things, they proceed without swerving off-course."

.....

- ◆ Remaining on course is key, according to Confucius; the petty person seems to be incapable of doing so.
- ◆ The only way to grow with the teachings of the *Analects* is through the combination of study and action that Confucius prescribes. First, we must read the text from start to finish, over and over again, internalizing its key teachings. Second, we must make these teachings work in our own lives.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Van Norden, *Confucius and the Analects*.

Questions to Consider

1. For Confucius, learning is a lifelong process and study includes learning how to interact with others. In what ways do we all learn to be social?
2. Confucius states that learning and not reflecting creates perplexity, and that reflection without learning leads to peril. For you, what is the relationship between learning and reflection?

Lecture 16

RITUAL CONDUCT IN THE *ANALECTS*

In previous lectures, you learned about skills discussed in the *Analects* that culminate in the core Confucian principle of consummate conduct. In this lecture, you will learn about the practice of ritual propriety, or *li*, which is where everything comes together. For Confucius, ritual is not just stuffy rule-following. To understand Confucius and the *Analects*, you must sense in ritual practice a liveliness and spontaneous joy that can be difficult to recognize.

THE BASICS OF RITUAL CONDUCT

- ◆ Consternation among scholars over whether Confucius was stodgy or transformative boils down to a single Chinese character: *li* (禮). This character can be translated into English as “ritual,” “ritual conduct,” or “ritual propriety.” *Li* encompasses all three English terms, and we will use all three in this lecture.
- ◆ Ritual is everywhere, and it brings the rhythms of society together even in the simplest of movements. It is a mistake to think of ritual only as the big stuff—the elaborate ceremonies that remain in shared memories for days, months, and years. Ritual, for Confucius, is far more comprehensive than most people’s narrow visions allow.
- ◆ Ritual lies at the very heart of the *Analects*, and it is perhaps the biggest action item in the entire *Analects* agenda. One of the first passages in the text lays out the grand plan that links harmony in society with ritual actions.

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1.12

Master You said, “The most valuable outcome of ritual conduct (禮) lies in achieving harmony. It was this that made the Way of the Former Kings so beautiful—small and great benefits flowed from it. And yet when things go awry, it is not enough just to know about harmony from study. Without serious engagement in ritual conduct and regulation of its effects, harmony will never be achieved.”

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- ◆ Harmony is all-important, but one of Confucius's successors—Youzi, or “Master You”—notes that harmony in itself is not the goal. Harmony at all costs is detrimental to the larger goals of society.
- ◆ In the previous passage, Master You is focused on a kind of big picture that we don't often consider when conflict appears in our own lives. What he seems to mean is that the core elements of social life cannot simply be made to harmonize. We cannot force harmony upon a fundamentally flawed situation.
- ◆ Ritual requires the proper person—one who is highly cultivated, engaged in self-reflection, and deeply learned—to carry out the kind of ritual propriety that results in real harmony. This kind of person is able to channel all of the skills we have studied into a highly prescribed set of actions. Moreover, that person carries out with precision a dizzying array of items that have to be memorized, practiced, and then performed.

THE PURPOSE OF RITUAL CONDUCT

- ◆ The point of Confucius's description of ritual conduct is that we must carry out prescribed actions, but enact them with fluid spontaneity. At its worst, ritual is much like a weak actor's poorly read lines, which remind everyone that the movement before them is scripted, contrived. At its best, ritual is a dizzying display of virtuosity that brings everyone into the

moment and raises the level of interaction to create a special kind of magic between people.

- ◆ Confucius speaks directly to the problem of just going through the motions in a passage that shows how seriously he took the ritual process.

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3.12

The saying “sacrifice as though present” means that one must sacrifice as though the spirits are actually present and involved in the ritual. The Master added, “If I do not engage in the ritual sacrifice myself, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all.”

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- ◆ The first sentence sets the tone for Confucius. The saying “sacrifice as though present” refers to family and state rituals, and it was already common by Confucius’s time. It has remained so even to the present—adapted to changing contexts, but bearing the core message that it is imperative not just to go through the motions in ritual conduct.
- ◆ In ritual interaction with the “unseen world,” performing the ritual consummately means that one must interact with departed spirits. Otherwise, the performance becomes just a ceremonial scene. That is the last thing Confucius wanted, and it explains his desire to participate fully in the ritual process—as though the spirits are present.

THE LIMITS OF RITUAL CONDUCT

- ◆ Confucius did not pretend to understand everything, and nowhere does his confusion appear more starkly than in a set of passages in chapter 3 that relate to a different ritual, one that apparently had little appeal for Confucius. The ritual involved the pouring out of wine as a sacrifice to ancestral spirits.

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3.10

The Master said, “After the libation in the *di* imperial sacrifice, I do not desire to watch further.”

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- ◆ The statement “I do not desire to watch further” seems discordant with what we already know of Confucius. How can someone so strongly committed to ritual practice in all of its details express a lack of interest? It appears that exasperation might be a better way to understand Confucius’s reaction to this particularly abstruse imperial sacrifice.

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3.11

Someone asked the Master about the *di* imperial sacrifice. The Master replied, “I don’t understand it. People who could understand it could rule the vast realm as though he possessed it right here”—and he pointed to the palm of his hand.

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- ◆ It might be better to think of these passages as the limits of ritual for Confucius. The power of ritual lies in its ability to weave its details into a transformative swirl that integrates disparate elements of society and makes them whole, even if only for a time. But what if the details are so obscure that even the greatest aficionados just scratch their heads?
- ◆ This type of confusion is what we should read into Confucius’s reaction in the previous passage. The *di* sacrifice seems to have lost any tether to social reality, and it spins off into the unknown. Although Confucius does not say the words, it appears that he finds that kind of detail to be quite useless.
- ◆ More commonly for Confucius, exasperation was directed squarely at upstarts who appropriated rituals so far beyond their place in society that he tried to remonstrate with them. More often than not, he was unsuccessful.

- ◆ The *Analects* contain a recurring theme in which Confucius speaks out against what he saw as ritual abuse. In the following passage, the Ji clan, which we have seen Confucius criticize before, is once again at fault in his eyes.

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3.6

The Ji clan was about to make the great sacrificial pilgrimage to Mt. Tai. The Master asked Ran Qiu, “Can’t you save them from this untenable situation?” Ran Qiu replied, “I cannot.”

The Master sighed, “Is it possible that Mt. Tai is not as able as Lin Fang in understanding proper ritual conduct?”

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- ◆ Critiquing the ritual leader of the Ji clan (the “Lin Fang” who is mentioned in this passage), Confucius notes clearly that Mt. Tai—the great sacred mountain in their midst—is the source of the ritual, not the Ji clan. Confucius’s contempt here is clear: How dare an upstart family usurp ritual that, for Confucius at least, was embedded in the sacred mountain itself and the cosmology it represents? That is one way that ritual fails.
 - ◆ How should ritual work, when everything goes beautifully? A passage coming just after Confucius’s exasperation with the Ji clan sums up the sage’s most positive feelings about rituals. In this passage, he discusses a ritual intended to achieve the difficult task of uniting keen competitors.
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3.7

The Master said, “Exemplary people do not compete with one another. The nearest exception is the archery ceremony. Greeting and accommodating each other, the archers mount stairs of the hall. Descending, after

contesting, they share a drink together. Even when competing, they remain exemplary people.”

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- ◆ For Confucius, the archery ceremony was marked by greeting, deference, toasting one another, and contesting with others. In its best sense, then, ritual is integrative, bringing even fragmented factions together—even in times of intense competition. If there is any hope for the social harmony that Confucius desired, people needed to grasp that ritual was not crusty, staid, and mechanical behavior. It was instead the very lifeblood of a well-functioning society.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Fingarette, *Confucius*.

Questions to Consider

1. Ritual is everywhere. Where do you see rituals in your own social interactions?
2. What is problematic about translating the Chinese character *li* as “ritual” in English?
3. Confucius asserts that one must perform the ancestral sacrifices as though the spirits are present. In what other areas of life might Confucius (and you) feel that it is necessary to be fully involved, and not just go through the motions?

CONFUCIUS ON EMBODIED RITUAL AND MUSIC

Confucius wanted to pour his whole person into ritual conduct. This idea has deep roots in the Chinese language; the traditional Chinese characters representing “ritual” and “body” are intimately tied together. For Confucius, ritual conduct is performative, not a set of mere prescriptions. In this lecture, you will learn about Confucius’s view of ritual conduct as embodied action.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

- ◆ The words spoken in rituals were important to Confucius. Consider the following entry in the *Analects*. For Confucius, details matter; and this passage is one of many that speak to the need to get it just right.

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7.18

The Master used precise pronunciations and phrasing in the following situations—reciting the *Book of Songs* or the *Book of Documents*, and when engaged in ritual practice. On all of these occasions, he emphasized ancient pronunciations.

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- ◆ Confucius was not immune to criticism about his care for detail. In fact, he was used to it—even ready for it. In chapter 3, Confucius doubles down on detail, going so far as to say that attention to detail is in itself ritual conduct.

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3.15

When the Master entered the Great Ancestral Temple, he asked questions about everything taking place. Someone critiqued, “Who said that this fellow from Zou village understands ritual processes? When he enters the hall, he asks questions about everything!” When the critique was reported to Confucius, he said, “That, too, is ritual conduct.”

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- ◆ For Confucius, asking questions had nothing to do with ignorance. Rather, it was a strong signal that the inquiring person cared deeply about the ritual process. When it comes to ritual conduct, Confucius believed, questioning lies at its very heart.
- ◆ Confucius goes even further just a few passages later. He clearly is ready for the criticism that comes with being meticulous about details.

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3.18

The Master said, “If, in serving your ruler, you are meticulous about each detail of the rites, others will consider you to be obsequious.”

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- ◆ If you are following the proper procedures, Confucius says, and if you care deeply about how the machinery of politics and ritual cohere, a good ruler will surely understand. If your peers find such detail tiresome, that's their problem.
- ◆ Confucius never takes his eyes off the central message that ritual builds upon all of the key skills in the *Analects*. Ritual is the portal to managing the whole world—what Chinese writers called “all under heaven.”

- ◆ In these passages, Confucius shows his passion for the very spirit of ritual conduct. Ritual is to be practiced, inquired about, and constantly reviewed. Maintenance and repair (not to mention study) are as significant to ritual as they are at the more developmental stages of learning that we have already considered.

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8.2

The Master said, “Reverence unchanneled by ritual conduct leads to travails. Prudence unchanneled by ritual conduct leads to timidity. Courage unchanneled by ritual conduct leads to recklessness. Straightforwardness unchanneled by ritual conduct leads to boorishness. When exemplary people are deeply committed to family and kinship ties, the people will seek to be consummate in their conduct. When those they have known for a long time are not neglected, the people will continue to interact freely with each other.”

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- ◆ In other words, ritual action is the key to vibrancy. On the other hand, slavish rule-following leads to deterioration—first of the ritual itself, then with greater devastation to the larger community.

RITUAL IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

- ◆ Confucius clearly saw ritual conduct and propriety as a driving force in managing self, state, and society. In chapter 14, we come across a passage noting that, if leaders adhere to ritual, the people will follow.

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14.41

The Master said, “If those in positions of leadership follow ritual process, then the common people will be easy to lead.”

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- ◆ This passage speaks precisely to the necessary combination of ritual commitment and movement. If the learned, reflective, exemplary person follows the prescriptions in detailed rituals, that person will channel a powerful social force that emanates from the very bodily movements ritually performed all the way outward to influence the family, the community, and the larger society itself.
- ◆ For Confucius, ritual conduct flows outward from the ritual's language, and then that language is embodied and sent forth to transform ever-larger groups of people. Confucius anticipates several recent scholars in stating that the serious practitioner is likely to find better models of ritual conduct and propriety in rural enclaves than among his fellow aristocrats.
- ◆ It is earlier people—the rustics of old—who hold the clues to excellence in ritual. Confucius addresses this issue at the beginning of chapter 11.

11.1

The Master said, “The first people to engage in ritual practice and play music were the country folk of old. Those who have come later were more refined and learned. But when it comes to engaging in ritual practice and playing music, I follow the first.”

- ◆ This statement implies that there is something fundamental about the way that rustics or simple folk approached ritual. Something powerful is being stated here, and it engages more than the relationship between body and ritual. It implies that there is a connection to the very foundations of ritual practice.

RITUAL AND FRUGALITY

- ◆ In the *Analects*, Confucius links ritual to frugality. This connection is more difficult than it might first appear to those of us who easily grasp that

spending more than we can afford on graduations, weddings, and funerals is foolish on many levels—even beyond the practicalities of the bottom line.

- ◆ For Confucius, ritual is not about being stingy; the ritual comes first. Recall that Confucius scolded his follower Zigong for begrudging the expenses of ritual.

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3.17

Zigong wished to abandon the almost defunct ritual practice of sacrificing a sheep at the New Moon ceremony each lunar month. The Master said, “Zigong! You begrudge the price of the sheep. I value the ritual as it is meant to be conducted.”

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- ◆ In this context, 25 centuries ago, Confucius perceived the sheep as property. He says here that the expense should not be spared. But Confucius appears to contradict himself earlier in the same chapter by stating the importance of frugality.

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3.4

Lin Fang asked about the roots of ritual conduct. The Master replied, “A question of the first category! As for ritual conduct, it is better to be frugal than extravagant. In mourning, it is better to let one’s grief flow than to worry over details of decorum.”

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- ◆ Clearly, Confucius was concerned with the roots of ritual conduct. Sometimes it is necessary to spend whatever the ritual requires. Most of the time, however, we should concentrate on genuine emotions and fluent, embodied action. Cost is not the central issue.

- ◆ In one prominent passage in chapter 3, Confucius expresses serious contempt for one of the stalwarts of early Chinese history, the ruler Guanzhong, who lived several centuries before Confucius's time. In this passage, Confucius makes clear that he views Guanzhong as a spendthrift.

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3.22

The Master said, "Guanzhong was a vessel of limited capacity." Someone asked, "Do you mean that Guanzhong was frugal?" The Master replied, "Guanzhong had three different residences, each with a complete staff—each person with one assigned duty. How could that be considered 'frugal'?" The interlocutor continued, "If that is the case, did Guanzhong understand ritual process?" The Master replied, "Rulers of states erect walled gates in front of their palaces; Guanzhong also did so. Rulers of states also have stands set up for inverted ritual drinking vessels; Guanzhong had them, as well. If Guanzhong can be said to understand ritual processes, well, then who doesn't?"

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- ◆ Although the references border on complete obscurity for many readers today, Guanzhong figured in Confucius's world in ways similar to how Franklin Roosevelt or Ronald Reagan might appear in American political discourse today. Guanzhong was a major figure, yet Confucius says here that Guanzhong did not understand the limits of ritual propriety.
- ◆ The matter of frugality also seems to underlie Confucius's criticism of the way Guanzhong imitates the rituals of the ruler of the state. Not only is it improper to be adopting rituals intended to be performed by the head of state, Confucius seems to be saying, it's also wasteful.

RITUAL AND MUSIC

- ◆ Confucius adds two other ideas to ritual practice that alternately reinforce and contest it. First, he states in chapter 3 that ritual lies at the heart of consummate conduct. In the following passage, he reverses the way that we usually think of developmental stages in Confucian learning.

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3.3

The Master said, “People lacking consummate conduct—
what have they to do with ritual conduct? People who are
not consummate in their conduct—what have they to do
with the playing of music?”

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- ◆ Consummate conduct leads, in our developmental model, toward precise ritual conduct and propriety. Proper ritual (and music) leads back toward further development of consummate conduct. Development is a continual process. For the nuanced practitioner, it never ends.
- ◆ The key to making sure that improvement never ends, Confucius felt, was music. Confucius understood what thinkers such as Plato, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and (more recently) Allan Bloom expressed in their own writings. Music matters. In many ways, consummate conduct finds its completion in ritual conduct, but ritual conduct is set into motion with music. A beautifully performed ritual is musical in ways that go far beyond the actual role of musicians in the events.
- ◆ Social life, when it flows in the way that Confucius expressed, echoes the melodic flow of music. In the following passage, Confucius links ritual and music with exemplary conduct. In addition, he gives us a picture of what happens if we don't do things right.

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16.5

Confucius said, “Pleasure can be found in three kinds of ventures. Injury can result from three others. To find pleasure in channeling one’s energy in ritual practice and music, to delight in the goodness of others, and to enjoy interacting together with companions of worthy character—all three of these bring improvement to the individual and society. Injury comes from delighting in boastfulness, taking pleasure in licentious diversions, and from indulging to excess.”

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- ◆ Confucius returns here to his rhetoric of oscillating positives and negatives. He is not afraid to talk about the downside, but the power of his teaching lies in explicating the upside. And while striving for proper character and doing well by others are truly goals for which the serious student should strive, it is in music that all of the elements of Confucian teaching come together in a powerful, fluid movement.
- ◆ Ritual creates community, and it is sustained with music. At its best, the society Confucius invokes in his teachings creates something larger than any individual could fathom. It is a community founded in personal integrity and transformed by communal ritual and musicality.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Fingarette, *Confucius*.

Questions to Consider

1. Confucius is clear that ritual conduct is not slavish rule-following. Think of examples of spontaneous, flowing ritual conduct from your own experience.
2. Confucius clearly felt that significant ritual moments require spending what needs to be spent. Yet he hardly advocated spendthrift ways. What is the relationship between spending enough and wasting resources in important ritual events?

THE *ANALECTS* ON EFFECTIVE RULE

Confucius's *Analects* is filled with details about the best ways to serve, to rule, and even to step aside when the circumstances require. All of the teachings of the *Analects* come together in governing family, community, and all under heaven. That act of governing is the greatest challenge in all of Confucian learning. This lecture examines how to govern effectively by managing these competing challenges.

A MODEL FOR SOCIETY

- ◆ In one intriguing entry in the *Analects*, Confucius states that to govern is to correct.

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12.17

Ji Kangzi asked about governing. Confucius replied, saying
“The key to governing lies in being correct. When leaders
are themselves correct, their influence will pervade the rest
of society—who would dare to do otherwise?”
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- ◆ This idea—that to govern effectively is to do what is proper—might not sound earthshaking on first hearing. Confucius's point is profound, however. If we are to rule effectively, Confucius seems to say here, we need to tweak, hone, and steer.

- ◆ This concept builds to the statement that government, and any official's government service, must serve as a model. It is not enough just to maintain whatever social order is in place. Government service must correct the little twists and turns that slowly set a good society off-course. Governing is hard work, as Zilu learns in a passage at the beginning of chapter 13.

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13.1

Zilu asked about governing. The Master replied, "Make yourself a model, and then inspire the people to work industriously." "Could you clarify?" asked Zilu. The Master replied, "Be unrelenting in your efforts."

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- ◆ Hard work will get you everywhere in Confucius's world—or at least very far along the path. Although the ending of that memorable passage ("be unrelenting in your efforts") perhaps steals the thunder, there is a broader message that we should not forget: Government service must be a model. It starts with the unflagging efforts of the government official, but that official must be a model that radiates a message—in itself—of proper conduct in society (family, community, and the larger world).
- ◆ Confucius persists in the previous passage with an admonition that one must learn to correct oneself. How can one be a model without looking inwardly at one's own conduct? It is almost as though the remonstrance ideal that we encountered previously is brought to a new level here, and that being a model implies making oneself one's best.
- ◆ This idea of self-correction links directly back to the personal cultivation and maintenance we have encountered already. It is a cycle of individual discipline that proceeds outward toward service in one's family and government and then right back toward further renewal of the self. This cycle of correction, maintenance, improvement, and repair lies at the heart of Confucius's message.

- ◆ First we correct ourselves, then we correct others. To put a finer point on it, we might say that the two elements are never really separate. In paying attention to our own frailties, we are already (perhaps subtly, but nonetheless powerfully) correcting others.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

- ◆ In one passage in the *Analects*, a visitor asked Confucius about governing. His answer speaks to the ritual spontaneity required to bring people together:

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13.16

The Governor of She asked about governing. The Master replied, “Lead so that those near to you are satisfied, and so that those far from you are drawn to you.”

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- ◆ Early in the text, Confucius speaks of the power of good rule to set others into motion. The image there is that the people, like the stars above, encircle the virtuous leader. In this passage, we see an intriguing twist on that idea: Those nearby are happy. The good ruler creates joy all around him.
- ◆ The good ruler also attracts those far from him to come toward him. Confucius means several things by “far” here. The Chinese text clearly speaks to our most common thoughts about physical distance. Confucius has more in mind, however: Every society has its outliers, and Confucius believed in the transformative power of a ruler’s good example. He states this sentiment in several places, and never more powerfully than in giving advice to an official named Ji Kangzi.

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12.19

Ji Kangzi asked Confucius about governing, “What if one were to kill those lacking the Way in order to attract others

who possess it?” Confucius replied, “Why should a leader speak of killing? If leaders wish to be good, the people will also be good. The abilities of the exemplary person resembles the wind, while that of the petty person resembles grass. The wind blows and the grass bends in response.”

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- ◆ The power to sway people with exemplary conduct so far outweighs the sheer force of law that there is no comparison in Confucius's thinking. In fact, no amount of punishment or coercion can even come close to accomplishing what a shining personal example can. This emphasis upon example over punishment would become one of the great points of conflict in Chinese history.
 - ◆ In Confucius's *Analects*, shining examples dominate. Perhaps the most famous passage in the text states explicitly that institutional measures cannot compare to virtuous rule.
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2.3

The Master said, “Use legal measures and coercion to lead the people, and they will surely seek to avoid punishment—yet they will lack a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (德), and regulate them with ritual conduct (禮), and they will gain a sense of shame and bring order to themselves.”

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- ◆ Of itself, society is molded and transformed through the skills that we have encountered to this point. As with Confucius's descriptions of ritual conduct, skillful fluidity in governing creates harmony. Even the simplest acts of governing ripple in influence to the larger society.
- ◆ Leadership failure, for Confucius, is not a matter of chance. Indeed, it seems to be close to being a matter of personal character. Leadership

is a product of putting all of Confucius's teachings together. No one can simply will it.

- ◆ Confucius speaks to the challenges of hiring and promoting talented people when his follower Zhonggong finds his way into public service.

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13.2

Zhonggong, while serving as an official for the Ji clan, asked about governing. The Master replied, "Make yourself a model for government officials, overlook minor faults, and promote people of worthy character and ability." Zhonggong inquired further, "How can worthy character and ability be recognized?" The Master replied, "Promote those you know to be worthy. As for those about whom you are unsure, how will others let them slip through the cracks?"

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- ◆ Confucius seems to understand the soft underbelly of effective rule. Even the official behind the scenes who promotes and demotes officials is vulnerable to chatter; to criticism. Confucius here gives Zhonggong (and the rest of us) a way of thinking about how good choices sometimes neutralize the tough choices that do not result in an official position.
- ◆ For Confucius, a ruler's first priority was to keep the people fed. By extension, government needed to provide the setting for people to thrive in agriculture and to feed their families. Greed will get rulers nowhere, in Confucius's world. However, the importance of food itself remained second to Confucius's most important teaching: Virtue and setting an example beats everything, even having enough to eat.
- ◆ The following passage may be startling for many listeners, but Confucius is adamant. Give up food, Confucius says, before you give up standing by your word.

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12.7

Zigong asked about governing. The Master replied, “Sufficient food, sufficient arms, and the people’s trust that leaders will stand by their words—these are the keys.” Zigong inquired, further, “If it is necessary to discard one of these three things, which would be discarded first?” “Arms,” responded the Master. Zigong continued, “If it were necessary to give up another of the remaining two, which would it be?” “Give up the food,” replied the Master. He continued, “Since early times, everyone has faced death; without trust in a leader’s word, society cannot be sustained.”

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- ◆ Nothing, for Confucius, goes ahead of being true to one’s word. Not even the sustenance of the ruler and the people. Above all, Confucius is concerned with the vitality of the larger community; it is the core social message of the *Analects*, and the ruler is only a tiny part of it. If the community will not endure, nothing else is possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVISERS

- ◆ From Confucius’s *Analects* onward, and throughout the Confucian tradition, advisers were the key to ruling effectively. This precept is one of the reasons why Confucius devoted his own teaching to creating talented advisers.
- ◆ For Confucius, ruling itself was a product of an odd combination of nobility, luck, and talent. It was such qualities that could lead someone to become a ruler in Confucius’s world of fragmented, battling kingdoms. Advisers, however, had only one combination package to offer—their talent, their advice, and their management skills.

- ◆ Confucius's focus on educating talented advisers is nowhere more clear than in a passage in chapter 14. Confucius speaks with contempt about a ruler whom he feels has poor moral character, yet who has somehow retained power in spite of his failings.

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14.19

The Master spoke about Duke Ling of Wei, saying that he had lost the Way. Kangzi inquired, "If this is the case, why did his state not fail?" The Master replied, "Zhongshu Yu managed diplomatic visits, Priest Tuo attended to matters in the ancestral temple, and Wangsun Jia was in charge of military matters. This being the case, how could the state have failed?"

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- ◆ According to Confucius, even a flawed ruler who had lost the Way could not come to ruin so long as trusted and talented aides were there to institute policy. In the world of kingly rule, in which flawed rulers more than occasionally found their way to the throne, it was up to able advisers to reset the path of state.
- ◆ Failure was not an option, at least in Confucius's teaching. Confucius's answer to his follower's question combines devotion to service, correction (remonstrance, really), and personal integrity—even when the ruler lacked it. And then it all comes together: For Confucius, in a passage in chapter 6, all it takes is a single, masterful stroke.

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6.24

The Master said, "The state of Qi could, with just one shift, become like the state of Lu; with one shift the state of Lu could attain the Way."

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- ◆ Confucius, being from Lu, has a positive vision of his own state. Even Qi—a lesser state in Confucius's estimation—could become as well run as Lu. And Lu itself could achieve the highest level of all—attaining the Way. All it would take to achieve these ends is one strike, just one move.
- ◆ If we are to follow the thread of the *Analects*, we surely understand that the “one shift” described in the passage above is focused upon a combination of the skills we have studied to this point—filial conduct, remonstrance, exerting all of one's effort, being true to one's word, and living with excellence. These merge into the comprehensive goal of consummate conduct, and it all comes together in ritual propriety.
- ◆ For Confucius, ruling effectively is thoroughly grounded in the morality and integrity of the ruler and the officials surrounding the ruler's office. Confucius maintained that successful individuals always needed to think beyond themselves. He was adamant until his death, and his message persists, even today.

Suggested Reading

Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*.

Fingarette, *Confucius*.

Questions to Consider

1. What characterizes a person with a public-spirited heart?
2. Confucius emphasizes that the core responsibility of a leader is to make sure that the people are fed. In what ways does that message resonate in the world today?
3. Rulers need help, and Confucius firmly believed that good advisors can even save a flawed leader. What is the relationship between leading and advising?

MENCIUS: THE NEXT CONFUCIAN SAGE

By the time Confucius died in 479 B.C.E., the Zhou order was crumbling, and the world would soon turn darker, more violent, and more intensely contested. This was the Warring States period, when contending domains reduced each other from 200 states all the way down to one. When the dust cleared, fully 250 years later, that fractured order had been replaced by a vast empire that went far beyond what Confucius envisioned. Nevertheless, the *Analects* would prove to be the cornerstone (and, more than occasionally, the lightning rod) for 25 centuries of Chinese rulers, scholars, and students. This lecture examines the life and work of Mencius, a key figure in this fascinating story.

MENCIUS

- ◆ One of the key actors in the story of Confucius's revitalization lived about a century after him. Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.) is the only other Chinese thinker who was deemed worthy of being given a Latinized name by the early Western translators in the 17th century. In Chinese, his name sounds like “Mengzi.”
- ◆ Mencius's collected writings represent both a spirited defense of Confucius's *Analects* and a significant expansion of it. Unlike the pithy moral aphorisms that dominate the text of the *Analects*, Mencius's text gives us long narratives that are more akin to dramatic performances. This makes them more accessible than the *Analects* for many people.

- ◆ Mencius's text—called, simply, the *Mencius*—is one of the most important books in all of Chinese history. It is almost three times longer than the *Analects* (11,705 characters for the *Analects* and 34,685 characters for the *Mencius*) and represents a series of social interactions polished into an elegant literary format.
- ◆ Most of what we know about Mencius comes from the book that he and his disciples wrote, but Mencius's text does not give many hints about his life. We do know that he was a native of Zou, a small state not far from Confucius's home state of Lu—both are in present-day Shandong province in eastern China.
- ◆ Mencius does not appear in any other texts until he made his way to the state of Qi in 324 B.C.E. Scattered texts confirm many of the travels mentioned in Mencius's text, but we know astonishingly little about the life he led.
- ◆ At least one tale about Mencius's childhood has remained to this day. It has been told in many forms, but one of the most memorable appears in a little learner's primer used over the last 1,000 years called the *Sanzijing* (*Three Character Classic*). It tells a story of Mencius's mother in rhyming three-syllable cadences. Widowed when Mencius was three, she worked to give little Mencius the proper learning environment.

.....
昔孟母

擇鄰處

子不學

斷機杼

Of old, the mother of Mencius

Chose a good neighborhood

When her son would not study

She broke the shuttle from the loom.

.....

- ◆ Another version has it that Mencius's mother moved first to a neighborhood near a cemetery, and precocious little Mencius became obsessed with funerary practices. This alarmed his mother, who hoped to raise a serious scholar. Next, she moved near a market, and little Mencius began tallying accounts with the vendors. This also worried his mother. Finally, she moved near a school, and her son eventually became one of the greatest scholars in Chinese history.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

- ◆ Going much further than Confucius, Mencius wastes little time with decorum when dealing with the leaders of powerful kingdoms. From Mencius's perspective, the key teachings we have seen in the *Analects* are inherent in the very fabric of social life. For him, the ruler who misses them will always fail; the ruler who embraces them will always succeed.
 - ◆ The very first passage of the *Mencius* gives a fine example of the philosopher's approach to hierarchy, leadership, and conduct. He was in the habit of visiting kings, and this passage has him meeting with a certain King Hui of the state of Liang. King Hui is impressed that Mencius has traveled many hundreds of *li* to see him. (A *li* is about one-half of a kilometer, or one-third of a mile).
-

1A.1

Mencius arrived to meet King Hui of Liang. The king said,
“Venerable sir, you have not regarded a thousand *li* as too
distant in coming to see me. Surely you must have the
means to bring profit to my state?”

.....



Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.)

- ◆ You might think of King Hui's last line as a kind of social nicety, without particular force or deep motivation. But Mencius uses it as a way to begin crafting his approach to ruling. "What is the point of mentioning profit?" asks Mencius. His response is pointed, and immediately the situation plays into Mencius's hands. "All that matters is that there be consummate conduct (仁) and rightness (義)." Why on earth, he snaps, would you speak of profit or advantage (利)?
- ◆ Mencius has cut the ruler to size—rhetorically, at least—before they could even sit down to a nice, refreshing drink after a long trip. But for Mencius, even more than for Confucius, these were not matters of politesse; they were the difference between success and failure, thriving and starving, in an increasingly vicious world.
- ◆ The risk of speaking out against powerful rulers on their home turf made it an equally serious enterprise. At this point, Mencius begins to explain precisely how the state will fail if those who lead it ask how they can profit. Everyone from the king's courtiers to the lowliest commoner will ape the leader's behavior, states Mencius, and all will be imperiled.
- ◆ A few entries later, Mencius is again speaking with King Hui of Liang.

.....

1A.3

King Hui of Liang said, "I have extended all of my effort on behalf of my state. When Henei's harvest was endangered, I moved the people to Hedong, and the grain to Henei. When the same thing happened in Hedong, I followed the same principle. As for the governing of neighboring states, I have not seen them do anything like the work I have undertaken. And yet they have not lost population and I have not gained, either."

.....

- ◆ Mencius cannot seem to bear giving a direct answer that speaks to kingly hubris. Instead, he begins with an analogy.

.....

1A.3

“Your Majesty enjoys the ways of war. I request to use an analogy from warfare. When weapons are raised and the drums begin to beat, a number of soldiers dropped their weapons and armor, and deserted. One of them went a hundred paces before stopping; another went fifty paces. The one who went fifty paces taunted the one who went one hundred—what do you think about that?”

“He shouldn’t have taunted him,” replied the King. “One soldier did not go a hundred paces, nothing more. They both deserted.” Mencius replied, “If that is apparent to you, then you will not expect your state to gain population from neighboring states.”

.....

- ◆ Completely entangled at this point, King Hui listens and watches as the spider begins to wrap him up in its web. Mencius launches into a long discussion of the kingly way and the manner in which a true king pays close attention to the proper seasons, so that people can work the fields and provide for themselves rather than only toil on behalf of the king in war or building projects. Careful attention to people’s labors is precisely the point that Confucius made in *Analects* 1.5: employ the people during the proper seasons.
- ◆ Mencius continues his lesson by discussing the importance of customs and education, hierarchy and discipline.

.....

1A.3

When those who have lived more than seven decades wear silk and eat meat, and the common people are not cold or hungry, although their ruler does not have the title of king, he truly is one.

.....

- ◆ Although this sequence is masterful, Mencius is not quite done. To finish off his prey, Mencius issues the rhetorical spider bite in very personal terms. It seems that the situation is a good deal direr in King Hui's realm than he was willing to acknowledge.
-

1A.3

When food humans need is given to dogs and pigs, you do not know enough to allocate it. When people fall from starvation on the road, you do not know enough to distribute food adequately. When people die, you seem to say, "It wasn't me; it was the harvest." But how is it different to kill people by stabbing them and saying, "It wasn't me; it was the weapon?" If only you stop doing the same with the crops, the common people will flock to your state.

.....

- ◆ The teachings of Confucius and Mencius have had a significant impact on almost all approaches to governing in Chinese history. When rulers agreed with them, those teachings worked their way into state policy. Even when rulers and thinkers disagreed, they were arguing within and against a dominant tradition that had come to be called Confucian, with Confucius and Mencius as its two most prominent spokesmen.
- ◆ Confucius and Mencius weren't dominant yet, however. It is easy to forget that the impact of the Confucian tradition did not emerge

directly out of the thought and work of Confucius, or of Mencius. It was a later development crafted by imperial governments, and it would take centuries to happen. For now, everything was in flux, and many thinkers felt that they had much better approaches than the people we call Confucians.

INBORN GOODNESS

- ◆ Building upon Confucius's own teachings, Mencius articulated with a newfound fire the message that people are born inherently good. All they have to do, according to Mencius, is to recapture and relearn what they have always held deep within them.
- ◆ The passage that follows is one of the many memorable Mencian interpretations of inborn goodness.

.....

2A.6

People all possess hearts-and-minds that cannot endure others' distress. The Former Kings each possessed such a responsive heart-and-mind, and they completed its potential with responsive and benevolent government. By living with a responsive heart-mind, and putting into practice responsive and benevolent leadership, ruling *all under heaven* was as simple as turning over the palm of their hands.

.....

- ◆ Mencius, again expanding upon Confucius's teachings about government, explicitly connects a sincere heart with compassionate government.
- ◆ Mencius is not saying (as critiques of Confucian thought would state right up to the present) that having a good heart was limited to self and family—for one's private life, but with no relevance to power politics in a messy, complicated era. He is stating that running the whole show,

being an effective leader who can unite the empire (something everyone wanted to see by the time Mencius reached old age), required having a beautifully nurtured, inborn heart of goodness. And everyone has one.

.....

2A.6

When I say that no person lacks a heart-and-mind that cannot endure others' distress, it is for this reason. Imagine a person who sees a little child about to fall down into a well. He could not endure what was about to happen. His compassion was not a result of wanting the good will of the child's parents, nor was it because he wanted the acclaim of his peers, and not even because of his aversion to the child's cries.

.....

- ◆ Mencius quickly dispenses with many of the arguments that have been made over the ages to respond to the cynicism that becomes a part of daily common sense. For Mencius, there is only one reason why even the most grizzled and miserable of people will do good in situations that strip them of the flawed ways that they have learned from others over the years. That reason is compassion.
 - ◆ Mencius goes further, stating that a heart of compassion is the very heart of all humanity. Everything must flow from it.
-

2A.6

This example [of the child near the well] shows that anyone without a heart-and-mind incapable of enduring others' distress is not fully human. Anyone who is incapable of feeling shame is not fully human. Anyone who is incapable of showing deference is not fully human.

Anyone who does not possess a heart-and-mind capable of distinguishing good from bad is not fully human....

People who possess these four traits are like those with four healthy limbs. People who have these capabilities but who do not act positively in the world cripple themselves.

.....

- ◆ You're not even human, states Mencius, if you do not begin with a heart of compassion. So how can you possibly govern humanity? For Mencius, as for Confucius, it was a matter of taking all of those inborn qualities and polishing them into conduct that will prevail both within and beyond the home. Constant learning and development of these qualities is the very foundation of all superior human conduct. For Mencius, there is no alternative.
-

2A.6

If people who possess these four elements can further develop them, it will be akin to a fire lighting or a rushing spring flowing through. When people develop these skills, they are capable of leading the territories within the Four Seas. And yet, if they do not develop them, they will be incapable even of serving their fathers and mothers, much less *all under heaven*.

.....

- ◆ Mencius is the quintessential spokesman for the Confucian tradition. Because Mencius was such a force as a thinker in his own right, it is sometimes easy to forget that he was Confucian thought's most influential "review essayist," explicating Confucius's *Analects* for later generations.

Suggested Reading

Lau, *Mencius*.

Nylan and Wilson, *Lives of Confucius*.

Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*.

Question to Consider

1. Mencius maintains that even the most flawed of people have goodness deep within their hearts. This idea has been prevalent in many societies over time. What are some arguments in favor of it (and opposed to it)?

CONFUCIUS'S DAOIST AND LEGALIST CRITICS

Confucius and Mencius were not speaking in a vacuum. Advisers in other states had equally strong opinions, and they were not shy about sharing them. Even some of those thinkers who generally agreed with Mencius disagreed sharply about some of his points. In this lecture, you will learn about the work of some of these dissenting scholars.

XUNZI

- ◆ The most famous disagreement among Confucian thinkers arose between Mencius and Xunzi, a writer who lived in the 3rd century B.C.E.
- ◆ At stake in the disagreement between Mencius and Xunzi was how society should be governed in a time of strife—a concrete and urgent matter. The argument quickly became the stuff of Chinese philosophical legend, and Xunzi has come to be regarded as one of Mencius's greatest foes. The historical telling badly caricatures the depths of both thinkers and their programs, however.
- ◆ Xunzi wrote what some regard as the most inspired literary and philosophical essays in the early Chinese tradition. His collected writings contain 32 elegant essays that show a level of literary refinement that provides a contrast with the brief aphorisms of the *Analects* and the carefully revised transcriptions of social interactions conveyed in the *Mencius*.

- ◆ Mencius felt strongly that people were born good. Goodness was always there—for everyone, from the beginning and to the core. Xunzi voiced the polar opposite view, that human beings were born flawed and in need of serious remedy. Only through years of nurturing, learning, and reflection, Xunzi believed, could people undo the bad nature with which they were born. Consider Xunzi's pointed rhetoric in the passage that follows.

.....

Mencius said that people's capacity to learn is evidence that their nature is good. I disagree. His statement shows he does not know what human nature is and has not pondered the distinction between human nature and what is created by human beings. Human nature is what Heaven supplies. It cannot be learned or worked at. Ritual and moral principles were produced by the sages; they are things people can master by study and effort....

Now, it is human nature to want to eat to one's fill when hungry, to want to warm up when cold, to want to rest when tired. These are all a part of people's emotional nature. When a man is hungry and yet on seeing an elder lets him eat first, it is because he knows he should yield.... Thus, if people followed their feelings and nature, they would not defer or yield, for deferring and yielding run counter to their emotional nature. Viewed from this perspective, it is obvious that man's nature is bad and good is a human product.

.....

- ◆ The particulars of this philosophical difference are fascinating, and much ink has been brushed over the details of this contrast between these two great scholars. If studied carefully, it is possible to tease out some of the implications of starting from good and bad with regard to human nature.

- ◆ On a practical level, however, the advice that Mencius and Xunzi give is quite similar. Both advocated an intense form of education, one that we might call Confucian, to repair the damage that, from Xunzi's point of view, was there from birth, and, in Mencius's eyes, was caused by society. That is the shared teaching of Mencius and Xunzi, and it goes all the way back to Confucius and the *Analects*. Study hard and improve (or recover) yourself: that is the core message of the great Confucian thinkers.

THE DAOIST CRITIQUE

- ◆ Going several steps further than Confucius, Mencius, or Xunzi, China's Daoist philosophers delighted in revealing the flaws in all textual learning and all rulemaking. A major theme in these Daoist philosophers' writings is that by striving too much—by being too literal, too result-oriented—we will forget to live and forget to be a part of the larger world.
- ◆ One of the most memorable critiques of bookish education comes from a lowly wheelwright of ancient China. It is conveyed to us by the Daoist philosopher known as Zhuangzi, who lived from c. 369–286 B.C.E., about the same time as Mencius.

.....

Duke Huan was reading upstairs in the hall while Pian the wheelwright was hewing a wheel in the courtyard below. Pian set aside his chisel and went upstairs, where he said to Duke Huan, "Dare I ask what words are in the book my Duke is reading?" The Duke responded: "They are the words of the sages." "Are these sages alive today?" asked the wheelwright. The Duke answered, "They have been dead for some time." The wheelwright said, "Thus what your Excellence is reading is like the dregs of dead sages!"

Duke Huan said, "How may a wheel chiseler have opinions about my reading? Explain, and I will allow it; if you cannot

explain, you will die.” The wheelwright replied, “I, your servant, understand things from the perspective of my own work. When I chisel a wheel, if I move slowly, it will not stay put; if I go fast, it will not carve. I find the way somewhere between a pace of fast and slow—I grip the chisel in my hands but respond with my heart. I cannot articulate it, yet something is contained within me. Your servant cannot teach it to his son, nor can his son learn it from him. In this manner I have put this into practice for seventy years, growing old carving wheels. Men of antiquity could not pass on what they practiced, and died. Because of this, what your Majesty is reading is the dregs of men of antiquity.”

.....

- ◆ For Pian the wheelwright, Duke Huan is someone who merely ponders the dregs of dead sages, waiting for a moment of inspiration that rarely comes. Pian’s hands-on-the-wheel learning is something very different. He chisels and shapes his world from the rhythms of his work. It is a matter of feel and harmony and flow. If you press or try or strive, you lose that flow.
- ◆ This characterization of life is a prime example of the early Daoist outlook, which emphasized the Way. The early Daoists stressed that the Way was like the veins in a piece of jade. They constitute a natural patterning that, once followed, is smooth and harmonic. We must follow their paths, not force them into straight lines, as Daoists accused the Confucians of doing.
- ◆ For the Daoist critics of Confucian writers, the real value of learning the lessons of the present and past lay in achieving this completeness, this effortlessness in the Way—and that goes far beyond what any pedestrian sayings about life and learning could ever do.
- ◆ Zhuangzi, the author of the wheel-chiseling anecdote, delighted in showing the Way in the most offbeat of examples.

.....

Cook Ding was carving a cow for Duke Wenhui. His hands darted, his shoulders leaned, his feet tapped, and his knees bent—performed, without missing a beat, to the tune of The Mulberry Grove Dance and the Jingshou Suite—as his knife sliced the meat. Duke Wenhui said, “How excellent it is that your skills have reached this level!” Cook Ding wiped his knife, put it aside, and responded. “What your servant loves most is the Way, which surpasses mere technical ability. When I began carving oxen all I saw were whole oxen.

“After three years, I never again saw an ox whole. At present, I, your servant, encounter it with my spirit, and do not see it with my eyes. Knowledge stops and the spirit follows its course. Relying on the natural, heavenly pattern, I pierce the large openings leading to the largest cavities, following that which is inherent. I never cut a tendon or ligament, much less a bone. A good cook changes knives each year—he cuts. A so-so cook changes knives every month—he hacks. Now your servant has already had this knife nineteen years. It has carved several thousand oxen, and yet the blade appears to have just come from the grindstone.”

To this, Duke Wenhui replies: “Excellent. After hearing Cook Ding’s words, I have obtained knowledge of nurturing life!”

.....

- ◆ If there is oneness—if there are lessons for living—in chopping up dead cows, we can be sure that it lies there waiting for our personal chiseling, crafting, and cutting. Every action has its Way, as any Daoist could tell you, but it is only in action that it can be found. The first line of the *Daodejing*

(*Classic of the Way and Virtue*) states the case in memorable fashion: “The way that can be articulated is not the constant way”—道可道非常道也.

- ◆ The Daoist critique of Confucian thought was perhaps the strongest ever leveled at it, even though the Daoists didn’t directly address the key question that concerned the Confucians—namely, how to govern. There were other critics, however, who had very precise notions of how the state ought to operate, and they took a very dim view of Confucian ideas.

THE LEGALIST PERSPECTIVE

- ◆ The biggest problem for Confucian thinkers, who naturally hoped to influence people in power with their philosophy, was that few people were as capable or willing to adhere to Confucian principles as Confucius, Mencius, and their most devoted disciples. Less diligent students too often skipped from study to action and back again (or took midday naps). Some merely recited the *Book of Songs*, which Confucius revered, not having a clue as to how its teachings might translate into action in the world around them.
- ◆ In the heart of the Warring States period, the Legalist philosopher Han Fei, who lived from 281–233 B.C.E., leveled a devastating critique at the Confucians. He used the example of a farmer in the state of Song that sums up every negative quality of procrastination, silly hopefulness, and fatalism that could be found in Confucian thought. The gullible farmer remains one of the most memorable examples in Chinese literature of missing the point entirely—of seeing only yesterday while tripping over today.

.....

Among the people of Song there was a farmer who tilled the land. In his field there was a stump. One day, while he was farming, a rabbit dashed across the field, hit the stump, broke its neck on impact, and died. Seeing this, the farmer cast aside his plow and stood guard at the stump,

hoping to gain another rabbit. He would find no more rabbits in this manner, and the farmer was mocked by people in the state of Song.

.....

- ◆ Most farmers would realize that they should continue hoeing and tilling if they want to be able to feed themselves. It does not take much real world experience to see the folly in this story. Han Fei tells the story because he wishes to assert that Confucius, Mencius, and especially their shallow followers are really just stump-watchers.
- ◆ Han Fei criticizes those who looked to the past for models of government. He said that those who sought to bring back the virtues of the Duke of Zhou—like Confucius himself—were fuzzy-minded dilettantes with no clear idea about how to proceed in a complicated world. They were no better than the dull-minded farmer in the state of Song, waiting for another rabbit to charge (or for the Duke of Zhou to appear).
- ◆ Even in the volatile times of the Warring States period, this criticism was very harsh. Han Fei derided the kinds of extremes that any bookish tradition can create. For every thoughtful, meaningful action that emerged from Confucius's careful study, there were many more people who tried to apply his principles but got caught in the morass of detail, or who failed to see the other three-quarters of a problem placed right before them.
- ◆ In the *Mencius*, King Hui just takes the abuse that Mencius heaps on him; his role is to be a literary foil for Mencius. Not so Han Fei. From Han Fei's perspective, the people don't know what they need, only what feels good in the moment. Only the rulers can know what the people need.
- ◆ The practical takedown by Legalist thinkers seemed to be the ultimate counterpunch to Confucianism. And the Confucians seemed dead in the water when the Legalists were the ones to unite all under heaven and create the first truly unified empire in Chinese history. That empire would last in one form or another (with a few gaps) for 2,100 years.

Suggested Reading

Hutton, *Xunzi*.

Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*.

Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*.

Questions to Consider

1. Xunzi maintains that people are born bad, and this idea has been persistent in many societies. But Mencius and Xunzi agree that the key to life lies in education. Whether good or bad, what is the role of learning in shaping behavior?
2. The Daoists spoke of being one with the flow of nature. Give several examples of being one with the flow in your own life.
3. Han Fei argues that looking to the past for solutions is useless (like watching for a second rabbit to rush into a stump). What other thinkers have emphasized looking forward, not to the past?

STATE CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism have all exerted powerful influences on China. It is no exaggeration, however, to say that Confucianism has dominated China since the beginning of the Han dynasty. This dominance is due in large part to the tremendous influence that Confucian doctrine has had on Chinese education. Although it was challenged at almost every step throughout its history, Confucianism was resilient, as you will learn in this lecture.

THE QIN DYNASTY

- ◆ In 221 B.C.E., the Legalist-inspired Qin dynasty wiped out the last contending army and unified China into a new imperial order—one that would persist, in one way or another, until the 20th century C.E. The Legalists and the Qin state standardized the written script, created an administrative structure that would persist for ages, and even proclaimed the appropriate width for carriage axles.
- ◆ The Qin dynasty loathed Confucian thought. There are stories about the burning of Confucian texts and of burying Confucian scholars alive—along with scores of thinkers from other competing schools of thought.
- ◆ For a while, the Qin dynasty's methods appeared to work. The Legalists had prevailed, it seemed, and the Confucians had lost. But the behemoth of the Legalist enterprise, the all-powerful Qin state, lasted only 15 years

(though the new imperial order that the Qin established endured for over two millennia).

- ◆ Most historians today will say that the swift downfall of the Qin dynasty is complicated, and that the Legalist rhetoricians, under a kind of ideological frenzy, underestimated the nuances of ruling actual people. Confucian writers, however, have held for the last 22 centuries that the Qin was undone by its very inability to care—its utter lack of compassion for what the people actually felt.

THE HAN DYNASTY

- ◆ After a four-year civil war, the Legalist Qin state was unseated by a peasant ruler named Liu Bang, who became emperor of a newly established Han dynasty. The Han would rule (with a brief gap) for the next four centuries, from 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E. It was during these four centuries that Confucian teachings moved from the sidelines right into the very seat of power in China—a place where Confucianism would more than occasionally be pushed aside, but from which it would never wholly leave.
- ◆ During the Han dynasty, the Confucianism of the *Analects* became buried in a complex amalgam that has come to be called State Confucianism or Imperial Confucianism. Confucian thought was incorporated into a massive state that was every bit as centralized, and in many respects even more so, than the short-lived Qin dynasty before it.
- ◆ State Confucianism in China developed in two very broad (and quite different) ways. On one hand, it developed a sophisticated cosmology that integrated Confucian teachings with pre-sectarian Chinese thought. On the other hand, the Confucian state developed a particular integration of practical and idealistic rhetoric that would last in China up to the present.
- ◆ Through it all, Confucian thought persisted. The historian Sima Guang, writing in the 11th century C.E., believed that Confucianism was what held Han dynasty together through the best and worst of times.



THE RISE OF BUDDHISM

- ◆ The Han dynasty suffered internal upheaval in the 2nd century C.E., and it collapsed in 220 C.E. Thereafter, China fell into a state of warlordism that was followed by the subdivision of Chinese territory into northern and southern kingdoms. This Period of Division lasted until the 6th century C.E. While tumultuous, this period produced substantial cultural transformation.
- ◆ The most significant political and intellectual change during the Period of Division was the entrenchment of Buddhism as an intellectual and, indeed, political force from the upper classes down to the common people. As a set of doctrines created in South Asia that were brought to China, Buddhism was, for many Chinese, a foreign doctrine that disrupted important aspects of family ritual and harmony.

- ◆ By shaving one's head and rejecting one's family, a Buddhist monk or nun went against some of the most basic ideas of family reverence known in China. Early Buddhist advocates in China argued that it was necessary to look beyond these surface-level differences and to focus on a message—profoundly original in the Chinese intellectual context—that addressed human suffering and the impermanence of life.
- ◆ For all of its positives, ephemerality and impermanence is something that Confucius's teaching never addressed in a serious manner. Some less-than-charitable interpretations have described a thoroughly committed Confucian life as toiling on behalf of family and state all one's life. At the very end, death is a good rest. This message might have appealed to devoted sons of noble or striving-to-succeed families, but it didn't touch the workers in the fields.
- ◆ Perhaps not surprisingly, this interpretation of Confucianism did not resonate powerfully with Chinese rulers, either. What they regarded as severe frugality and a sometimes useless pacifism was problematic, at best, for many of them. For that reason, officials tended to be more thoroughly Confucian than the rulers who employed them.
- ◆ Buddhism made its slow, integrative move into China from the middle of the Han dynasty onward. It is now so much a part of Chinese tradition that it is foolish to think of it as a foreign doctrine. In fact, in spite of initial resistance, Buddhism has been a part of Chinese tradition almost from the time it arrived. It is no small irony that one of the most persistent integrative forces in Chinese history came from afar.
- ◆ The Three Treasures of the Buddha—the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha—open a window onto a way of thinking about life and religion that was startlingly new to China. The Buddha offered the ideal of enlightenment to all people; the dharma articulates the universal laws of human life; the sangha refers to practicing communities—people who have gathered together to follow the Buddhist way.

- ◆ Buddhism's Four Noble Truths state that life is suffering, and that the ways of the world do not bring happiness. Craving lies at the root of suffering, and suffering can only end when the cycle is broken. Finally, the Buddhist Eightfold Path as a means of ending suffering requires right perspective, right thought, right speech, right action, right life-path, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The goal, albeit a distant one, is nirvana—not an explosion of joy or lands of milk and honey, but an extinguishing, as when two fingers put out the flame on a candle.

RELIGIOUS DAOISM

- ◆ Although it never was to have the enormous influence of Buddhism on all levels of Chinese society, religious Daoism played a significant role in the diverse intellectual climate of the time. Its focus on astrology, breathing techniques, mysterious sexual rituals, and the ingestion of substances that were thought to guarantee immortality deeply influenced many rulers and practitioners in later China.
- ◆ The same Period of Division that saw Buddhism come to the fore as a force in Chinese religious life gave power to the writings and practices of groups of Daoist adepts in China. Venerating the Chinese philosopher Laozi as a deity and raising many other figures into a Daoist pantheon, the practices, lineages, and writings of what is often called religious Daoism form only a loose connection to the more philosophical teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi.
- ◆ Many of the deepest teachings of religious Daoism and its various sects can be found in the *Daozang*, an enormous compendium referred to as the Daoist Canon. The compilation began in the 4th century as a way to bring together varying strands of Daoist thought and practice. It remains a vital source for both practitioners and scholars today, even though its contents are enormously diverse, containing well over 1,000 scrolls and thousands of discrete texts.
- ◆ A vibrant new style of literature and strange stories took root during the Period of Division, and the period saw a wide array of innovative medical

techniques and artistic creations. From that moment forward, Confucian thought would blend (sometimes almost seamlessly, but at other times in a highly contested manner) with Buddhism and Daoism. Legalism, too, became integrated into Confucian thought.

NEO-CONFUCIANISM

- ◆ By the Tang dynasty (618–906 C.E.), China had well-developed monasteries and academies devoted to Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian teachings. The Tang state—and the Sui state before it—each promoted a blending of doctrines meant to support their claims to rule and perpetuate their own command of the territory.
- ◆ By the 9th century, after the disastrous rebellion of An Lushan (755–763 C.E.) that tore the Tang dynasty apart, a number of influential thinkers in the Confucian tradition began to articulate a new vision of their teachings. These scholars saw Buddhism, in particular, and Daoism as undermining the core teachings of Confucianism, on which (they argued) Chinese civilization was built. They roundly condemned the financial benefits given to Buddhist and Daoist sects, as well as their lucrative landholdings.
- ◆ This backlash had political, economic, and intellectual implications. Many landed Buddhist and Daoist estates were confiscated, and the organizational strength of the various sects, if not their ongoing connections to wide groups of believers, was dealt a severe blow.
- ◆ The following centuries were turbulent, and they are among the most fascinating in Chinese history. The syncretic blending of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist thought continued apace, even as Confucians doubled down on what they thought of as the excesses of the other doctrines.
- ◆ The Confucian perspective in this period was articulated forcefully in an influential essay written by the scholar Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072 C.E.), who saw both a past that was problematic and the potential for a powerful future. Ouyang Xiu pointed to the disorder created after the fall

of the Han dynasty, asserting that it was a time that was ripe for the entry of dangerous foreign doctrines that would harm China. The way forward, he argued, lay in a commitment to a spirited rethinking of the original Confucian vision.

- ◆ The profound intellectual diversity that followed was a creative synthesis of classical Confucian scholarship and the realities of life in a later era. The adherents of this synthesis sought to apply what they thought to be the original vision of thinkers such as Confucius and Mencius, and thereby to reform life around them.
- ◆ This Neo-Confucian vision prevailed in powerful and often uncontested ways for the next 10 centuries. It slowly became so controlling and dominant—even with the attendant influences of Buddhism and Daoism—that it came to be second nature in the vast and, for the most part, unified empire that today we call China.

Suggested Reading

Gardner, *The Four Books*.

LaFleur, *China*.

Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of Modern China*.

Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*.

Questions to Consider

1. Confucius's teachings lost before they won. Can you think of other historical processes that worked in this manner?
2. What does Neo-Confucianism mean to you? How was later Confucian thinking similar and different from the *Analects*?

SIMA GUANG AND THE CONFUCIAN REVIVAL

The revived form of Confucianism that emerged in China in the 11th century C.E. is known in the West as Neo-Confucianism. Although Neo-Confucianism is difficult to define, its vision of reengaged Confucian learning took the *Analects* seriously while engaging a changing world, and it changed China. One of the best ways to understand that vision is by taking an extended look at historian Sima Guang, one of the giants of Confucianism.

THE LIFE OF SIMA GUANG

- ◆ Sima Guang lived approximately 1,500 years after Confucius—almost 1,000 years before our own time. Everyone in China today knows his name, whether they agree with his perspectives or not. He is in textbooks and on postage stamps, and new books are written about him every year. Sima Guang was steeped in the teachings of Confucius. He was a Confucian in almost every respect.
- ◆ One of the most famous stories in all of Chinese history goes like this: On a sunny day in the 1020s, a precocious little boy named Sima Guang, seven years old, sat reading classical historical documents in his father's well-appointed study. He was the very picture of the diligent young scholar in a culture that admired lifelong learners. As Sima studied, children played in the large courtyard surrounding the family compound. Suddenly, cries of confusion came from the courtyard. Sima Guang's biography in the *Songshi*, or *Song Dynasty History*—a work compiled

in the 14th century by a team of historians in the subsequent Yuan dynasty—tells what happened next.

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A group of children was playing in the courtyard when one child climbed onto a large, decorative urn. His feet slipped and he fell into deep rainwater in the vessel. The other children fled in fear and confusion, but Sima Guang grasped a stone and broke the vessel, saving the child's life.

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- ◆ This passage shows the very picture of the Confucian vision. It was the little reader—the gifted student of the classical histories—who was able to move directly from text to action, from clear knowledge of his books to making a difference in the world.
- ◆ Far from presenting Sima as a young hermit, it shows that only he was able to take action and save the life of the drowning child. The other, presumably less serious, children were unable to cope with the enormity of the problem and fled. The roughhousing youths likely had far more experience in the world than the seven-year-old bookworm in his father's study. But only little Sima was able to bridge the fundamental gap between learning about the world and living in it. Only Sima put down his book, switched roles, and picked up a rock.
- ◆ This story has everything to do with the big, historical management book that Sima Guang would later write. It has everything to do with the larger story of how Confucian learning was supposed to lead to active engagement in the world.
- ◆ Forty years later, after passing the highest state examinations at a breathtakingly early age and moving quickly through the administrative hierarchy, Sima Guang found himself in another study—that of the emperor himself. The immensely talented Sima held the prestigious

position of chief tutor to the emperor Yingzong. It was a sure route to the premiership, the highest civilian office in the empire.

- ◆ His official task was to explain the lessons of the past to the emperor in a way that could help him function smoothly in difficult political and managerial situations. In fact, he had been doing this for decades. The *Song Dynasty History* explains.

.....

When Sima Guang was seven years old, he already appeared to be a highly accomplished individual. He would hear the classical histories recounted by the family tutor; he admired them, and explained their contents to his family, all the while highlighting the broad outlines and teachings for them. From that point onward, he was never without a book in his hands, to the point that he paid no attention to hunger or thirst, heat or cold.

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- ◆ In 1066, a mature Sima Guang highlighted the broad outlines of the classical histories not for his family, but for the emperor. He distilled the lessons from China's history as a way of showing how government should be managed in the present day. He had already spent a lifetime studying, and throughout that life he had constantly sought to translate his learning into meaningful results in the world around him.
- ◆ Sima was on the verge of putting all of his knowledge into practice in a position of great influence. But in 1067, the emperor Yingzong died, and his eldest son, Shenzong, succeeded him. Sima Guang quickly learned that he would have a difficult time convincing the late emperor's son of his cautious Confucian perspective. After a year of trying (unsuccessfully), his influence was on the wane and his chief rival was given the premiership over him. So Sima retired to Luoyang, a city 200 miles away, and wrote.

- ◆ The result of Sima Guang's efforts, a 10,000-page book called the *Zizhi tongjian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Ruling*), is a brilliant combination of painstaking scholarship and very angry revenge. It is both a commentary on past political developments and a guidebook to effective government. Sima and his five assistants scoured over 300 original historical sources and placed what they saw as the best elements into their new book. They then provided layers and layers of commentary from the time the events happened, from later pundits, and in their own words.
- ◆ It is these commentaries that constitute the managerial gold in the *Comprehensive Mirror*, because they create a series of linked case studies showing not only what happened over the course of close to 1,500 years of Chinese policymaking, but how the various actors outlined, argued, and implemented the policies. The work hammers home several lessons so powerfully that every careful reader has been influenced by them for almost 1,000 years. The lessons are rooted in the *Analects*, but are shaped by Sima Guang to suit later eras, in which society, the economy, and the political system had changed dramatically.

SIMA GUANG ON HIERARCHY

- ◆ Sima Guang studied Confucius and the *Analects* assiduously. He regarded the articulation of roles as the first and most formative lesson for all effective management. Sima begins the *Comprehensive Mirror* with it, and configurations of changing roles appear on virtually every page. Changing roles, which are a part of all of our lives, can be seen in children becoming parents—and then grandparents. Changes occur when people complete courses of study, when employees are promoted or demoted, and in many more situations.
- ◆ If Sima Guang were to appear suddenly as a management consultant in an American corporation, he would likely be struck by how hard Americans try to pretend that these variations in roles don't exist. For Sima, "hierarchy" was not a bad word. The reader of the *Comprehensive Mirror* learns that nothing is ever exactly level.

- ◆ Even in China during Sima Guang's time, making hierarchy work could be frustrating. Consider the following excerpt from the *Comprehensive Mirror* that speaks to this difficulty.

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The Emperor once arrived suddenly at the gate of the *shangshu*. Prostrating himself, Chen Jiao asked the emperor, "Whither are you bound, Your Majesty?" The emperor said, "I want to examine the state documents." Jiao said, "This is my duty and not a thing Your Majesty should take care of. If I have been remiss in my duty, I request that I be dismissed forthwith. Your Majesty ought to return." The emperor was ashamed and, turning his carriage, returned.

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- ◆ This is as far from top-down management as we could imagine. In many ways, Sima Guang calls for attunement—a kind of harmony within the organization—that leaders must understand if they hope to succeed in a complex world and at home. As in this example, the tune can be a clanging, abrasive reminder that the person in charge isn't in charge alone.
- ◆ Sima Guang's arguments are based solidly on the teachings of Confucius's *Analects*, but they also tackle issues so far from those Confucius envisioned as to require a rethinking of their implications. Living in the 11th century and writing a work of history that covered the full expanse of time from the century Confucius died to the beginning of his own era—403 B.C.E.—959 C.E.—Sima Guang charted the development of a Chinese imperial system and taught how Confucian principles still mattered, no matter the complexity of the organization.

SIMA GUANG ON REMONSTRANCE

- ◆ Remonstrance is the art of warning—the art of the junior member of any unit telling the senior what he needs to hear. The *Comprehensive Mirror* contains 10,000 pages on this topic. Sima Guang highlighted remonstrance

for a reason: it is this vital shift that puts the other lessons into motion and creates an organization that learns.

- ◆ Criticizing your boss is about as fraught as life gets in relative peacetime. Bosses can certainly teach their employees a good deal, but they need information too. Subordinates are often in the best position to deliver this information. If the information is bad, subordinates often keep silent. By contrast, the *Comprehensive Mirror* is filled with colorful and sometimes startling examples of ministers of government staring down emperors and telling them what they need to hear.
- ◆ Lively examples sit side by side in the *Comprehensive Mirror* with less dramatic reminders to the ruler that the criticism is not personal. The subordinate's loyalty is to the organization and its ideals, not just to the person who happens to be in charge. Loyalty to something beyond the person who happens to be in charge at the moment is a powerful message that can embolden employees and make bosses shudder. This is generally a good thing for organizations.
- ◆ One point is certain, and Sima Guang knew it well: When knowledge moves upward in this manner, organizations prosper. Remonstrance is the dynamic that sets the organization's learning structures spinning. When practiced as an organizational art—the way that Sima Guang articulated throughout the *Comprehensive Mirror*—it contains the kernels of powerful growth and continual learning for individuals, divisions, and corporations. It takes the core lessons of the *Analects* and shows how they can work in a world that had changed markedly since Confucius lived.
- ◆ Sima Guang saw that the greater goal of an organization needs to be not mere cooperation, but coordination. Coordination results in this transfer of knowledge as a matter of course, like playing the notes on a scale. Such coordination may sound impossible, but Sima Guang thought otherwise. The *Comprehensive Mirror* focuses on the goal of achieving coordination in all organizational practice.

- ◆ Sima Guang's reinterpretation of Confucius was enormously influential. His approach to history in the *Comprehensive Mirror* led to innovations in historical scholarship throughout China, and it influenced Confucian thinkers in Japan and Korea as well. And Sima Guang's own life story has been a part of Chinese life for most of the last millennium. Sima Guang and the *Comprehensive Mirror* remain a lively topic in China to the present day.

Suggested Reading

Ji Xiao-bin, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China*.

LaFleur, *China*.

Questions to Consider

1. Sima Guang, echoing Confucius and others, felt that hierarchical order was a foundation of society. Americans are largely skeptical of hierarchy. How do you feel about hierarchy in your life? When has it worked? When hasn't it?
2. Sima Guang was a bookworm when he was young, yet he was able to respond effectively in real-life situations and saved a drowning child. Can you think of other examples of moving from text to action?
3. Confucius (and Sima Guang) emphasized that people must fully embrace their roles. What roles do you play, and how have they changed over the course of your life?

Lecture 23

NEO-CONFUCIANISM AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

The great historian Sima Guang was not the first committed Confucian who sought to craft the teachings of Confucius for a new age. From Sima Guang's Northern Song dynasty onward, Confucianism would enter a new period that would reshape the very foundations of education and government in China. This lecture will examine several figures who played key roles in the development—and eventual ossification—of Confucianism in China.

OUYANG XIU

- ◆ Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) was one of the consummate scholar-officials of 11th-century China, and he played significant roles in politics, administration, and letters during his long official career. He is known for a number of influential essays that are still anthologized today, as well as a wide range of innovative poems.
- ◆ Ouyang was also one of the Northern Song's great innovators in historical writing, which had come to be a leading genre for Confucian thinkers over the centuries since Confucius. Ouyang's historical writings were fresh interpretations of the recent past that were sometimes criticized for being too innovative, too ready to espouse a strongly Confucian vision of the past.
- ◆ This strong commentarial voice was one of Ouyang's major contributions to a century of Confucian change in historical writing. Ouyang Xiu deeply

influenced Sima Guang as a Confucian government official and historical scholar. Ouyang's influential essay, "On Fundamentals," is a spirited celebration of Confucian principles, and it builds in its conclusion to a criticism of other doctrines, such as Buddhism and Daoism.

THE CHENG BROTHERS

- ◆ The reassertion of a powerful Confucian vision had only begun by the time Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang died in the 11th century. Another major Northern Song dynasty intellectual, Cheng Hao, and his younger brother, Cheng Yi, are often credited with further reinvigorating Confucian studies. Building upon the work of Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, and others, they created the foundation for a new kind of Neo-Confucian scholarship based on the study of *li*, or immanent principle.
- ◆ One way to think about immanent principle is to see everything in the world as having a principle manifested within it that gives it a particular character. And while each thing in the world has its own immanent principle, all of these are enveloped in one overarching principle. This Neo-Confucian philosophical turn used the *Analects* as a foundation, but moved far beyond Confucius's questions to others that considered more directly how the world (and cosmos) worked.
- ◆ Together, the Cheng brothers are regarded as two of the Six Masters of Northern Song thought. Cheng Hao held that immanent principle was a core principle of nature and that it gave rise to all things. At the core of the individual's behavior was *ren* (consummate conduct). Cheng Hao defined *ren* in terms of feeling, even empathy, maintaining that patients who are numb to pain or itching are akin to people without consummate conduct—they cannot feel in a full manner.
- ◆ This capacity for empathic response fueled further teachings on moral cultivation and action in the wider world. For Cheng Hao, the subtle interplay between tangible matters of the universe—things we can see and touch—and the intangible immanent principle created the foundation for an innovative approach to human conduct in a changing cosmos. But

these ideas are so far from the *Analects* that it is possible that Confucius would have had to be retaught his lessons for a new era.

- ◆ Known as a lively and outgoing individual, Cheng Hao thrived in the dynamic social universe of 1070s Luoyang, the central Chinese city where a conservative faction of Confucian officials lived in semi-exile. Recall that Luoyang is where Sima Guang composed the *Comprehensive Mirror*. Cheng Hao's personal influence on his contemporaries was strong, and it played a role in the gradual acceptance of *lixue*, or "Studies of Immanent Principle," in the Chinese intellectual world. Cheng Hao died in 1085 at age 53.
- ◆ More taciturn than his brother, Cheng Yi eschewed administrative office. The fact that he outlived his elder brother by 20 years benefited their mutual legacy, even though those years were checkered by court factionalism and divisive politics. Cheng Yi diverged somewhat from the teachings of his brother and the early master Mencius with regard to self-cultivation and learning over the course of a lifetime. For Cheng Yi, moral cultivation was grounded in *jujing*, or composed living.
- ◆ Self-reflection required cultivation of the heart-mind with a calm disposition. Through it all was the Cheng brothers' focus on the overarching immanent principle of *li*, and Cheng Yi expanded slightly on Cheng Hao's assertion of *tianli* ("heavenly *li*") with the famous statement that "heaven is *li*" (*tianzhe li ye*). In this statement he combines two powerful ideas and ties them together as one.

ZHU XI

- ◆ The ideas of Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, the Cheng brothers, and many other Confucians of the 11th century had a profound influence on Zhu Xi (1130–1200), an intellectual who lived a century later. Zhu Xi did much to further this version of Neo-Confucianism and create a kind of bibliography of Neo-Confucian philosophy.
- ◆ One of the foremost intellectuals in all of Chinese history, Zhu Xi not only offered new approaches to the expanding school of Neo-Confucianism,

he also reshaped the very curriculum that subsequent generations would study. He fundamentally reorganized Confucian education on the model of what became known as the Four Books: Confucius's *Analects*, the works of Mencius, and two small sections of the *Classic of Rites* that Confucius admired. This new approach became the foundation for all scholarship leading to the imperial examinations for over six centuries.

- ◆ Zhu Xi was born in Fujian province, and stories of his youthful precocity abound, as is common with major intellectual figures in China. Although he passed the imperial examinations at the strikingly early age of 19, he did not immediately assume office, instead preferring various sinecures that allowed him to focus on reading, study, and reflection.
- ◆ Well into his third decade, Zhu Xi's education was eclectic, including serious study of both Buddhist and Daoist traditions, in addition to the Confucian works that he had to master for the examinations. It was not until he was 30 years old that Zhu Xi took up the advice of his father, by then deceased, and began sustained study of the Confucian tradition.
- ◆ Elaborating upon the ideas of heavenly *li* of Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi maintained that *li* is immanent in all things and connected to *taiji* ("supreme ultimate"), a kind of universal power: *Qi* ("substance, matter") is the tangible manifestation of *li*, and the two work together in a constant, flowing process. They vary in terms of *yang* and *yin* energy and in their relative strengths at any one moment.
- ◆ The extension of these Confucian ideas into the realm of human learning and conduct was a key element of Zhu Xi's ethical teaching. He strongly criticized Xunzi and championed Mencius regarding the innate nature of human beings. Echoing Mencius, Zhu Xi argued that people were born with perfect *li*. That clarity could be sullied by excess *qi*; the key to moral self-cultivation was to clarify *li*'s effects.
- ◆ Zhu Xi maintained that knowledge of the world and action in it worked together. Even so, many of his teachings clearly prioritize the search for knowledge, leaving action in the world less clearly articulated. At the core

of knowledge and action for Zhu Xi was “The Investigation of Things” (格物 *gewu*). As with *li* and *qi*, these investigations require seeing more deeply the relationship between immanent principle and physical matter. Debate over the implications of these investigations continues to this day.

WANG YANGMING

- ◆ Wang Yangming (1472–1529) was another of the most prominent intellectuals of China’s late imperial period. He combined enormous talent as a general and administrator with one of the liveliest philosophical agendas in all of Chinese history.
- ◆ Wang passed the imperial examinations in 1499, saw a brief period of exile when he got into a dispute with one of the emperor’s powerful eunuchs in the early 16th century, and then served as governor of the province of Jiangxi. In his decades of administrative service, Wang was able to put some of his teachings into practice and see for himself the effects of his philosophical outlook on actual policy and administration.
- ◆ As a young man Wang studied the works of “Cheng-Zhu” philosophy—the writings of Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi. Wang lived more than three centuries after them, and much had changed in that time.
- ◆ Wang’s dissatisfaction with the Cheng-Zhu emphasis on the dynamics of learning led him toward a fresh approach toward action in the world. Arguing that knowledge could not be prior to action—that they were deeply intertwined at all levels—he found many earlier thinkers in the Confucian traditions to be irredeemably flawed.
- ◆ Wang also maintained that learning is not by its very nature good. It can degenerate in profound fashion, and memorization, recitation, and other popular approaches easily broke down into “vulgar learning” (*suxue*) that actually harmed the educational process. Serious learning meant careful study and reflection—internalization of teachings—rather than merely studying for an examination.

- ◆ Wang further asserted that immanent principle was not in the mind, but was rather one with the mind. This seemingly subtle adjustment to the teachings of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi had profound implications.
- ◆ Wang argued that the world cannot be investigated independently of the self, and that our notions of objective knowledge had to be adjusted accordingly. Thinkers to this day in China and the West grapple with this issue, whether in the terms expressed by Wang Yangming, Immanuel Kant, or others.

EXAMINATION AND OSSIFICATION

- ◆ In China's later dynasties, the feverish and bountiful philosophical speculations of Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming slowly became frozen in place as a kind of ossified commentarial shell. Within decades, this shell became as much an intellectual prison for young scholars as it was once ripe territory for innovative thought.
- ◆ In the centuries after Zhu Xi's death, even if every other variable had stayed the same, the Four Books focus of the curriculum would have had a debilitating effect. Within decades, students were memorizing the Four Books and devoting the rest of their studies to the products that emerged from a burgeoning industry in cram books and cram schools.
- ◆ Something dangerous for the growth of young minds was happening, and it would persist for many hundreds of years, to the point that a wicked backlash was inevitable. It is one thing, as in the 1,500 years before Zhu Xi, for study of Confucius to be strongly recommended, or even required. It is another thing entirely for Confucius to be the key to the inner chambers—the only game in town—with other readings added only as study continued to more advanced stages.
- ◆ The examination system remained geared to producing officials for a society of approximately 100 million. In 1400, there were 36 Chinese provinces; in 1900, there were 38. As a result, 500 years later there was

still almost the same number of governors to be selected through the rigorous examination system. But during this time, in which the Four Books became the foundation of Chinese civil-service education, the population of China exploded from an already formidable 100 million in Sima Guang's day to 400 million in the late 19th century. The number of official positions didn't even begin to keep pace. By 1500, the possibility of rising through the myriad levels of testing had gone from dismal to nearly impossible.

- ◆ It only got worse from there. A prominent novel of the 18th century—*In the Groves of Scholarship* (儒林外史 *rulin waishi*), sometimes translated simply as *The Scholars*—laid bare the misery of examination seekers, teacher-charlatans, and predatory merchants seeking to benefit from the willingness of families to pay for their sons to be “educated.” Both irony and rebuke lay at the heart of *The Scholars*. Consider the following preface to the text.

.....

The four words “success, fame, riches, and rank” are the number one focal point of the whole book. Therefore this theme is broached right at the beginning.... All the multifarious variations of the rest of the book are but hellish transformation of these four words made manifest. It can be said that this is similar to a blade of grass turning into a sixteen-foot golden Buddha.

.....

- ◆ As the 19th century wore on into its third, fourth, and subsequent decades, these words would haunt educators in China. The examinations had been transformed into a great, glowering “golden Buddha” of retribution, and his sights were set squarely on Confucius himself—the lonely sage who couldn't even find a significant position in his own lifetime.

Suggested Reading

Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects*.

Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*.

Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell*.

Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Confucian teachings develop as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and other traditions blended together 1,000 years after Confucius lived?
2. How did later Confucian thinkers use the *Analects* and its ideas in new ways?
3. What were some of the implications of adding Confucius's *Analects* to the curriculum required of every person who studied for the examinations in China for more than 500 years? More broadly, what becomes of a text when it is required (good and bad)?

CONFUCIUS'S COMEBACK IN A GLOBAL WORLD

The long history of imperial China ended with the forced resignation of the last emperor of the Qing dynasty. By that time, Western powers had long been exerting a strong influence on internal Chinese affairs through aggressive trade practices, gunboat diplomacy, and open warfare. The Chinese government and its Confucian civil service system seemed helpless in the face of this onslaught, and strong internal pressures began to develop. This lecture examines these developments and the current state of Confucianism in China and around the world.

ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

- ◆ Toward the end of the Qing dynasty, China's stultifying array of rituals and rules had bound its populace and limited its progress. Confucian practices had long been central to that system. As the decades went on—and as the news became steadily worse with regard to foreign intrusion and the inability of China's rulers to check it—a drumbeat began to be heard: It's all Confucius's fault.
- ◆ Confucius had become so dominant through the very civil-service examination system that was meant to make his teachings resonant, nuanced, and subtle, that his teachings instead came to be associated with almost everything traditional in Chinese society. When both internal and external pressures began to mount, the Confucius (and the *Analects*) associated with traditionalism came to be anathema, the very target of disgust from everyone who sought to reform the way that China operated.

- ◆ Equally deep frustration echoed throughout East Asia. Why would a Confucian-centered examination system train people for anything like the challenges of a changing world? From this perspective, the changes advocated by scholars who tried to adapt Confucianism to new times—people like Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming—were wholly inadequate in the face of the enormous impacts of global commerce and social unrest.
- ◆ The battle for ascendancy between Confucianism and its detractors took many forms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many Confucians thought of themselves as pragmatists, and it was not at all uncommon to see a focused kind of internal Confucian reform in the writings and actions of scholars, officials, and even military warlords.
- ◆ For a brief period, the attempts at reform found their way to the higher reaches of the Qing imperial government with an innovative program set forth by Prince Gong (1833–1898). This program was ultimately crushed by a different kind of traditional authority in the person of the empress dowager Cixi, who exerted great influence over China for close to 50 years until her death in 1908. But that should not make us take less seriously the sincere attempts within the Chinese government to use Confucian thought—including the specific lessons of the *Analects* themselves—to remake China at the dawn of a new century.
- ◆ A new age was upon China in the first decade of the 20th century. The last imperial examinations were given in 1905 and the final lower-level exams about a year later. Suddenly, Zhu Xi's chosen Four Books were no longer required reading, and there was no clear replacement in sight. Both traditionalists and reformers were looking at a dramatically new landscape.
- ◆ Half a decade later, the imperial government fell. It was replaced by a Republican government that was riddled not only with internal conflict and external weakness, but also an initial lack of vision about what a modern China really was. This set the tone for a great debate about the role of traditionalism (and Confucius in particular) that rages in East Asia to this very day.

COMMUNISM AND NATIONALISM

- ◆ With the advent of a Republican era in China, the cases for and against Confucius took starkly opposed tracks. The Nationalist Party, or Guomindang, which controlled much of China until the Communist takeover in 1949, gave a warm embrace to both Confucian and Christian teachings. While the embrace wasn't always without tension, it did begin to signal two broad camps in modern Chinese life: those who sought an Eastern Ethics and Western Science approach, and those who rejected Confucian traditionalism outright, blaming it for the bulk of China's ills.
- ◆ Along with that split, the 20th century saw emerging critiques of Confucius and Confucianism grow to arguably their greatest intensity. From the fall of the empire until the last decades of the century, writers of fiction and political thinkers savaged traditional culture. On some level, Confucius was the stand-in culprit in the narratives, not so much because of specific lessons he promulgated as because of the ubiquity of his message over the centuries.
- ◆ At the same time, another equally significant trend was developing. Following a long line of thinkers who sought to bridge East and West, including those who took the Eastern Ethics and Western Science view, Nationalist intellectuals sought ways to reconcile Confucian and Christian teachings, on the one hand, and a rapidly changing international situation in the wake of World War I, on the other.
- ◆ The stakes in these internal debates became even higher in the face of Japanese aggression and World War II. Japan was eventually subdued with the help of Allied Forces in 1945, but a bitter, all-out civil war erupted between the Nationalists and Communists almost immediately thereafter.
- ◆ By 1949, the Communists were victorious, and what was left of the Nationalist Party fled to Taiwan and set up a rival government that still rules that island today. The Communists, meanwhile, began to assert a very different kind of rule over the bulk of continental China.
- ◆ With the Communist triumph over the Nationalists, Mao Zedong announced in Beijing on October 1 of that year that "the Chinese people

have stood up.” Although the actual words could be interpreted in various ways, later events clearly show that part of that “standing up” was to be against traditionalism. As it turned out, Confucius was to bear a large brunt of the attack.

- ◆ From the early 1950s through the devastating decade of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Analects* was pilloried. Moreover, Confucius’s birthplace in Qufu—and particularly the vast, rolling Confucian Cemetery in Qufu’s outskirts—were devastated by vandalism from the young Red Guards, who were vehemently antitraditional. So thorough was the systematic contempt for Confucius that it seemed to present a profound break between an earlier traditional history that embraced the sage and a modern history that utterly rejected him.
- ◆ Perhaps out of sincere ideological commitment, and perhaps with a bit of strategic thinking, the defeated Nationalist general Chiang Kai-shek took a starkly different path in the island-bound Republic of China (known to many as Taiwan). There, traditional teachings remained the foundation of a modern educational system and an economy that would be among the world’s most vibrant in the latter half of the 20th century. The Nationalists seem to have concluded that at least part of the path back to playing a role in Chinese life lay in embracing Confucius—even as their powerful and hostile neighbors across the Taiwan Strait rejected him.

CONFUCIANISM’S RESURGENCE

- ◆ Confucius and the *Analects* have since made a spectacular recovery with the Chinese government and in its messages to both domestic and international audiences. That this could have happened mere decades after the graves of Confucius’s family were being destroyed in the sage’s hometown is remarkable. Nevertheless, an active Confucian message is being aggressively promulgated both internally and abroad.
- ◆ China has been subtle enough in its use of Confucianism to make it an effective new means of outreach in the Western world. Westerners who know China only through what they read often get a very skewed

picture of life there, and through a lens that frequently stresses Chinese authoritarianism—hard power, in the terminology of international relations.

- ◆ But China has been increasingly effective with a sophisticated form of soft power, and never more so than in the growing (and enormously well-funded) set of Confucius Institutes that have sprung up all over the world. The institutes are funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education, and they are not completely independent operating entities. Formed ostensibly to promote the teaching of Mandarin Chinese, they have become both cultural oases in areas with little knowledge of Chinese culture and highly contentious zones of conflict in universities that are not used to dictates coming from foreign governments.
- ◆ In 2006, an obscure professor of dietary science (not Confucian studies) named Yu Dan became an instant sensation throughout China by publishing a series of reflections on the *Analects* for a readership that no one then realized was ravenous for Confucius's message. Yu Dan's approach makes textual scholars squirm, because it can seem like a self-help lesson with no connection whatsoever to the text of the *Analects*. Indeed, some people have called Yu Dan a charlatan, and a few have booed her off the stage at Beijing University. Nevertheless, Yu Dan has become fabulously wealthy by providing the hope that ordinary people can engage with the teachings of the great sage of Lu. She has shown that people want—and possibly even need—those seemingly outmoded teachings. Demand for books on Confucius has injected new vibrancy into the publishing industry.
- ◆ In spite of the criticism Confucius's ideas have received since ancient times, when we ask today how we should live our lives in a 21st-century world, Confucius is still there. Confucius is still the face of China, and his persistent teachings speak to how we should live with integrity and with others.

Suggested Reading

Bell, *China's New Confucianism*.

LaFleur, *China*.

Sahlins, *Confucius Institutes*.

Spence, *The Search for Modern China*.

Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion*.

Questions to Consider

1. Pressure for change in China came from the inside and the outside in the 19th century. Can you think of other historical situations in which the emphasis is often placed on outside forces, masking the inside ones?
2. Confucius in many ways became the stand-in for everything bad about traditional China by the early 20th century. Can you think of parallels in which one traditional figure becomes the focus of a large number of arguments for change?
3. Confucius and the *Analects* have made a remarkable resurgence in the past few decades. What do you see that is persistent in the teachings of the *Analects* that might contribute to that resurgence (or do you see it mostly as a matter of outside forces and issues)?

AFTERWORD

Having completed these 24 lectures, you have learned not only a great deal about Confucius, but also much about his followers, the *Analects* itself, and the development of a Confucian tradition in China. You have a grasp of the most central conceptual elements in the text, and you have developed a working sense of some of the individuals mentioned in the book. These lectures form a self-contained whole, and you now have a good working knowledge of the subject.

This afterword is designed for those listeners who wish to keep learning about Confucius and the *Analects*. As we have seen, Confucius valued a kind of all-in study that never ended. He wanted serious stories to join a broad conversation about how to live among others in a complex world. If you are inclined to pursue such a project, the place to begin after these lectures is the text of the *Analects* itself. Toward that end, we'll begin a list, much like we did in the foreword to this guidebook.

.....

[1] Read

Read half a dozen translations together. Your reading should be both comparative—reading passages that speak to you in all of the books—and cover to cover, in order to grasp the teaching dynamic of the *Analects*.

.....

In my History 150 introductory seminar (“Confucius and the World”), I assign six different translations of the *Analects*. One of the most important skills that anyone can learn when confronting great books is to read them again and again. It is just not possible, upon a first reading, to grasp connections that begin to appear clearly with subsequent readings. Only then does one have a sense of the whole—of where the story, or argument, is going.

As a teacher, I have found it extraordinarily difficult to convince students to reread important texts. No amount of pleading or prodding seems to convince more than a handful to read, reread, and then read again. If you are devoted to careful study in your own life, it probably won't be hard to convince you of the importance of repeated readings, but my students and I have discovered another, unexpected, positive that flows from reading a half-dozen different translations of the *Analects*.

Not only does processing the material help to internalize it, but something else begins to happen, as well. As readers begin to internalize different ways to approach the material of the *Analects*, they begin to see patterns within and among the translations. Slowly, the teaching dynamic—the varied pace of insights throughout the text, like a class taught by a fine teacher—begins to emerge. Without forcing the issue, multiple readings of different translations open the text to new insights.

As you begin to cement your understanding, I recommend the following six translations. There will surely be more to follow in the coming years, and I am certainly not casting aspersions on ones I have not listed here. Spanning from the mid-20th century to the second decade of the 21st century, these books present a wide range of very good translations—each with different positives (and maybe an occasional negative; remember, translation is about choice).

I have included one translation that is somewhat dated, but it provides a useful contrast with the others. I have included the bibliographical notes for them here, so that you can get a glimpse of what each book has to offer. Through these books, you will gain a much deeper understanding of the *Analects* with the foundation provided by these lectures and a reading of these books. I have listed them here in chronological order, but you may choose to read them in any order you wish.

.....
[Arthur Waley Translation]

The Analects of Confucius. Translated and annotated by
Arthur Waley. New York: Vintage Books, 1938. A classic

translation from an earlier interpretive era, Waley's translation fits nicely with a phenomenal array of texts that he translated from Chinese and Japanese. Although some translations are dated, they all have a literary flair that is lacking in some more modern translations.

[D.C. Lau Translation]

The Analects (Lun yü). Translated with an introduction by D. C. Lau. London: Penguin Books, 1979. D.C. Lau's translation was the standard for more than three decades. He follows the Zhu Xi commentary closely when interpreting passages, which gives it even more of a foundational flair. Several generations of scholars living today got their introduction to Confucius from D.C. Lau's work.

[Ames and Rosemont Translation]

The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation. Translated with an introduction by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. New York: Ballantine Books, 1998. Ames and Rosemont have provided readers with an invaluable interpretation of the *Analects* that clarifies and extends a social-relational message in the text, even as they bring their philosophical and sinological teaching and scholarship to the translation.

[Edward Slingerland Translation]

Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2003. Edward Slingerland has provided a valuable service to readers by translating the *Analects* in thorough fashion and including a discussion of the commentarial tradition below each translation. This is the place to go when readers are ready to learn more about the long tradition of *Analects* commentary (and one of the few places to gain a sense of it without learning classical Chinese).

[Annping Chin Translation]

The Analects (Lunyu). Translated with an introduction and commentary by Annping Chin. New York: Penguin Books, 2014. Annping Chin's translation of the *Analects* pairs nicely with her biographical work, *The Authentic Confucius*. Reading them together is a useful exercise. Chin uses an influential commentary by Liu Baonan to shape her interpretations of challenging passages. In addition, she includes a very useful feature in which she discusses her translation of the text after most of the passages.

[Simon Leys Translation]

The Analects: The Simon Leys Translation, Interpretations. Edited by Michael Nylan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014. Simon Leys's translation registers high

on the liveliness scale and is consistently fascinating in its interpretations of both central and more obscure terms. Michael Nylan's introduction is masterful, and it is the work of one of the most distinguished scholars of ancient China of our time.

.....

There is no rush for this reading. Take the process at your own speed, and think about connections as you proceed. In time, you may be drawn to even more translations from earlier eras, as well as those that are hot off the press. By the time you have both the foundation of these lectures and a firm grounding in multiple translations, you will know clearly which next steps you are drawn to. If you continue to learn more in this manner, make use of the bibliography for this lecture series and those of the translations you read. You will begin to see the names of texts that have influenced virtually every translator during the past half century, and you will begin to join the conversation, as we discussed in lecture 2.

By far the most important steps you can take are to grasp the foundations for studying Confucius's *Analects* (the purpose of these lectures) and then to learn more about the text through deep comparative reading. In my classes, that is the foundation we lay first. From there, though, I teach ways to bring understanding to entirely new levels through concentrated, if not terribly time-consuming, activities. The first of these can be summed up as the second item on our list.

.....

[2] Explore Language

Get yourself a notebook devoted to study of the *Analects*. Make a list of items in the *Analects* that you find most important. Now use as many dictionaries as you can to explore some of those concepts in the text, and build your own knowledge of the semantic fields surrounding them.

.....

If you have a dictionary or two lying around, start there. Look up “filial” or “consummate” in the dictionary and work through the definitions. Go online and explore synonyms and antonyms, and consult other dictionaries. Jot down what you learn in your notebook; start a pattern of noticing and transcribing what you see. Do your translators use many different terms to translate a key idea into English (as they surely do with 仁 *ren*)? I require my students to start a separate notebook page for each key concept and to make spoke outlines of the semantic fields surrounding each word. For ideas such as 天 *tian*, there is usually not much on the page (which can provide a lesson in itself). For others, such as we’ve seen with 仁 *ren*, the page begins to fill quickly. If you continue to pursue this project—taking your time as you go, and using spare moments here and there—you will start to see the pages grow into a self-teaching tool that will expand your understanding.

Let’s go further, though. If you are familiar with other languages, I encourage you to explore the key terms or ideas of the *Analects* in those languages. For example, if you speak Spanish, think about some of the same ideas you have encountered in your study of Confucius’s *Analects*, and continue to build your semantic fields with Spanish—add them directly to the page you started with English terms; add new languages to your growing semantic fields.

Again, you will begin to see a pattern emerge. Most languages have ideas similar to those that Confucius expressed (they were about getting good at life, after all, and people all over the world have sought to do just that). Still, it won’t be long before you sense that each language treats these ideas a little bit differently—and the distinctions you make will grow your understanding even further.

Whether or not you know other languages, you likely have experience with the way that people express themselves in different parts of the country, within various regions, and even within parts of the same community. Think about the same range of Confucian terms, and reflect upon ways that people express similar sentiments, such as the basic idea of 仁 *ren*, consummate conduct. Can you think of sayings that refer to being devoted to one’s parents? I was struck, recently by what one of my students from West Virginia said about a person he thought was acting with consummate conduct.

He told of what she had done, and then he added, “She’s good people.” Employing a regional phrase, he started in the singular and ended in the plural—and that is exactly the kind of phrase you need to write down in your notebook when you hear it. It grows your semantic field around the concept of 仁. The phrase the student used is about the social nature of individual effort—in consummate conduct. It is precisely in this manner that you will grasp that the language of the *Analects* is the language of living with others in society. It is everywhere.

With your notebook and the grounding that you have gained by thinking about language in the context of life, you are now ready for the next step that I require of my students. Almost as soon as they begin to consult dictionaries and think about language in their own lives, I teach them how anthropologists study language and culture. For example, when I am doing my fieldwork on Chinese pilgrimage mountains, I try to understand how language is used in the specific location of the mountains. For that, I bring my trusty notebook. When I hear something that sounds intriguing, such as “people from the front of the mountain and the back of the mountain can’t understand each other,” I jot it down immediately, even if I am not sure how I will use the information in the future. In short, I have learned something, and I make a note, just in case I can find a connection. In my *Analects* class, I ask my students to look for language in the world around them. Don’t just seek it in dictionaries; look for it in the world.

So let’s add a little field research to our growing list.

.....
[3] *Become a Language Fieldworker*

Become a fieldworker in the world of changing language.
Language is not just in books—it is in life. Language is alive
and moving. Find it, and write it down. Then think about
it, and look for more.

.....

One example I like to ponder is Confucius's use of a very significant term in his thought (one that would persist in many traditions throughout Chinese history): 道 *dao* (sounds like “dow”). It is often translated as “road,” “path,” and, more generally, the “Way.” So I ask my students to think about paths, roads, and ways and then to look for them everywhere. And a funny thing happens when they take the intellectual concept of “path” and then start to see and even walk it in their worlds. At Beloit College, where I teach, there are sidewalks carefully designed to keep people walking along the path and not to trample the beautiful grass all around the campus. Yet my students, with their notebooks, start to notice all sorts of little shortcut paths through the grass—shortcuts that the sidewalk designers didn't anticipate. The flow of humanity just trampled right through the most carefully planned of layouts.

And then those students begin to think about the ways that shortcuts, paths, and ways work in the manner that we conduct our lives. They become anthropologists in the field of lived language, and their understanding of what Confucius and his followers were doing in the *Analects* goes even deeper.

By the time that my students have internalized their use of notebooks for the study of lived language from Confucius's *Analects*, the rest begins to happen almost as a matter of course. Once they have gotten used to noticing that concepts such as 孝 *xiao*, 仁 *ren*, and others are everywhere around them, they can't help but notice those ideas, even in their reading for seemingly unrelated classes (and they soon learn that everything is related). I have had students find the *Analects* in psychology and political science classes, in their reading of English literature, and, yes, even in physics, chemistry, biology, and the other natural sciences. So the next step will probably take care of itself. Here it is, though.

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[4] Read Widely about Life

Read other books about life from a wide variety of traditions. These can vary from books about understanding what life is about (St. Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau,

Thoreau, and others) to books about how the world works (from the humanities and social sciences to the natural sciences). Read—and keep writing in your notebook.

.....

Most cultural traditions have a long history of reflecting upon the meaning of life. Read some of those books (a few are listed in the item above). Don't forget the many fine books about those writers and their works, too. What you are doing when you reach this level is a kind of syntopical reading that puts you in charge of defining and refining questions you want answered. Use books and life (always with your notebook) to gain your own kind of mastery of the material. In short, make it your own.

Literature can be very useful in this process. Shakespeare is unparalleled for raising complex problems of filiality or consummate conduct, but from Cervantes and Dostoevsky to Ann Beattie and Philip Roth, you will find material for your thinking with everything you read. And don't slight the daily news—or even your social media feeds. Every single information source contains scores of potential teaching elements, from the strategies politicians employ to everyday stories of local heroes (and goats). The child who saves grandma from a burning kitchen has a story that parallels the greatest of Confucian tales. Likewise, the politician who caves to public opinion while another rival stands firm for principle sets up a thought experiment about Confucius's contrast between exemplary people and petty people.

Books, news, the world around us—the *Analects* is alive, and it is everywhere. Make the *Analects* your own, and you will be on your way in just the way Confucius taught.

This brings us to the last item in our list. It is the culmination of the entire learning process, and it continues, on and on, the more you learn and the more you instruct.

.....

[5] Teach It

Make it your own, and then teach others what you have learned. Once you have joined the conversation, keep learning and expanding. You can't help but want to share what you have learned, and you should share it.

.....

For my students, this step is at least ostensibly more formal than I am advising in this guidebook. My students have to give a public presentation and write a paper. In other words, all of the steps I have laid out above culminate in making their studies their own—in joining the conversation in a meaningful way. This work culminates in teaching it to others. In a classroom, presentations and written work are time-honored ways to teach others. But all of us follow these steps if we are committed enough. In presenting these lectures, writing these guidebook notes, and publishing essays about Confucius, I am taking what I know and trying to teach it to others.

My students do it, too, and if you take these steps seriously and begin to join the conversation that Confucius and his students began 2,500 years ago, you will do the same thing. You will likely begin by telling people you know well and whom you trust to understand your initial steps at understanding. They will likely ask questions, and you then will do your best to articulate answers, or at least convey a way of grasping the interpretive challenges. And in doing all of that, you will have become a teacher, and you will have helped someone else begin to join the conversation, too.

Let's take a last look at the complete list. Every item fits together, and the five items in the foreword work with these items to create, literally and figuratively, handfuls of ways to approach the difficult but rewarding text that is Confucius's *Analects*.

.....

[1] Read

Read half a dozen translations together. Your reading should be both comparative—reading passages that speak to you in all of the books—and cover to cover, in order to grasp the teaching dynamic of the *Analects*.

[2] Explore Language

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[4] Read Widely about Life

Read other books about life from a wide variety of traditions. These can vary from books about understanding what life is about (St. Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, Thoreau, and others) to books about how the world works (from the humanities and social sciences to the natural sciences). Read—and keep writing in your notebook.

[5] Teach It

Make it your own, and then teach others what you have learned. Once you have joined the conversation, keep learning and expanding. You can't help but want to share what you have learned, and you should share it.

.....

As you proceed, you will surely find ways to tailor these ideas to your own ways of learning. It is a guide to a process that combines what Confucius taught with 2,500 years of learning that followed. And if you pursue it, Confucius knows exactly what to call you—a teacher.

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2.11

The Master said, “Always reviewing past knowledge and yet continually learning about present conditions—such a person can truly be called a teacher.”¹

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Robert André LaFleur

¹ Please consult my blog, *Round and Square*, for my own continued learning and teaching about the *Analects*. Just look for the prominent “Confucius’s *Analects*” location on the *Round and Square* home page, and you will be led to examples of each of the 10 items covered in the foreword and afterword of this guidebook. There you will find sample spoke outlines of semantic fields, photographs that touch upon some of the text’s core concepts, stories about Confucius and his followers, my own ongoing translation of the *Analects*, and information about the Confucian tradition within and beyond China.

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in its interpretations of both central and more obscure terms. Michael Nylan's introduction is masterful, and it is the work of one of the most distinguished scholars of ancient China of our time.

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Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. New York: The Free Press, 1993. With 100 translations of key texts from Chinese history (including materials dealing with society, economy, family rituals, and more),

this collection is one of the most useful single books any student of Chinese culture can own.

Elman, Benjamin A. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. A comprehensive study of the civil service examinations in China's late imperial period and their influence upon Chinese mobility and kinship politics.

Fang, Achilles, trans. *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (220–265)*. Edited by Glen W. Baxter. Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965. A superb and comprehensive translation of a small portion of Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Ruling*. Not only does Fang translate the text of the *Comprehensive Mirror*, he also translates the texts from which Sima Guang and his aides drew their material.

Fingarette, Herbert. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972. This slender volume has had an enormous impact on Western studies of Confucius's *Analects*. Fingarette argues that readers who only see staid officiousness in *Analects* passages miss the point. Instead, the *Analects* articulates an almost magical command of social and ritual life that speaks to readers even today.

Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1982. The great literary critic Northrop Frye's first study of the Bible speaks to a challenge that readers of Confucius's *Analects* also face—to grasp its messages, it is necessary to read it straight through, from beginning to end, and possess it as a totality, no matter how difficult that might be.

Fung, Yu-lan. *The Period of Philosophers*. Vol. 1 of *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Translated by Derk Bodde. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952. Fung's history of Chinese philosophy is thorough and still useful more than six decades after its publication. The first volume treats the classical period of Chinese philosophy dealt with in most of these lectures.

———. *The Period of Classical Learning*. Vol. 2 of *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Translated by Derk Bodde. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.

The second volume of Fung's work treats the development of the Confucian tradition along with other forms of thought that saw prominence during the imperial era.

Gardner, Daniel K. *Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. One of the most useful brief introductions to Confucianism available.

———, trans. *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2007. Gardner's overview of the Four Books is a very useful introduction to the foundational classics that formed the basis of all study for examinations in the late imperial period.

———. *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects: Canon, Commentary, and the Classical Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. Written by a scholar whose scholarly work has focused upon Zhu Xi, this book shows the ways in which Zhu Xi articulated an innovative approach to the *Analects* and shaped late-imperial education.

Gardner, John. *On Becoming a Novelist*. Foreword by Raymond Carver. New York: Harper & Row, 1983. Gardner describes a way of writing fiction that focuses upon setting the reader in a dream world of sorts; only clumsy writing breaks the dream. A parallel can be drawn to ritual conduct in Confucius's *Analects*; only clumsy practitioners break the dream of flowing, even spontaneous, ritual conduct.

Goldin, Paul R. *Confucianism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. Another solid overview of the Confucian tradition, from the world of the *Analects* through the development of Neo-Confucian doctrines and into the present.

Graham, A. C. *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989. A valuable study of the manner in which thinkers contended with one another during the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.E.). Readers will never again be lulled into thinking of early philosophers as speaking in relative vacuums during the era. Instead, they engaged with one

another in many ways and vied for ascendancy in thought even as rulers of their time vied with one another for power:

———. *Two Chinese Philosophers: The Metaphysics of the Brothers Ch'êng*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992. A fine study of the philosophical work undertaken by Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi of the Northern Song period. The Cheng brothers created a foundation for the thought of Zhu Xi and later thinkers.

Granet, Marcel. *Chinese Civilization*. Translated by Kathleen E. Innes and Mabel R. Brailsford. Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1964. One of Granet's masterworks, *Chinese Civilization* was originally published in 1929. It provides an innovative Durkheimian analysis of Chinese social life that is as memorable as it is astute.

———. *The Religion of the Chinese People*. Translated, edited and with an introduction by Maurice Freedman. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. Granet's 1922 introduction to Chinese religion is lively and surprising to certain kinds of objectivist readers. Granet combines a thorough knowledge of Chinese classical texts with a French literary flair that the translator, Maurice Freedman, calls "genius."

Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. One of a series of collaborative works by David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* provides readers with an approach to the *Analects* that is thoroughly philosophical and deals with larger questions of interest to students of both the Chinese tradition and comparative philosophy.

Henricks, Robert G., trans. *Lao-Tzu: Te-Tao Ching: A New Translation Based On the Recently Discovered Ma-Wang-Tui Texts*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989. An introduction to and translation of the Mawangdui archaeological discovery that has deeply influenced our knowledge of early Chinese culture and the texts that were written in the pre-imperial period.

Hutton, Eric L., trans. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. A well-written one-volume translation of one of the most elegant writers in early China. Xunzi's 32 essays are some of the finest

literary gems ever written, and they provide a fascinating set of agreements and counterpoints to the thinking of Confucius and Mencius.

Inoue Yasushi. *Confucius: A Novel*. Translated by Roger K. Thomas. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1992. An extraordinary novel by a well-known Japanese novelist, this book is (in the best tradition of Japanese historical fiction) thoroughly researched and founded on strong historiographical foundations. Inoue tells a story of Confucius's profound influence through the eyes of a fictional follower who became enraptured by Confucius's bearing and influence. It goes into substantial philosophical depth with text passages from the *Analects*, and it gives a thorough (fiction mixed with text passages) introduction to three of Confucius's closest followers.

Ivanhoe, Philip J. *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2000. Ivanhoe's text speaks to the necessity of maintenance in the Confucian tradition and the increasing emphasis on moral self-cultivation in Confucian and Neo-Confucian thought through the centuries.

Ji, Xiao-bin. *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China: The Career and Thought of Sima Guang (A.D. 1019–1086)*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005. A book-length study of Sima Guang's life, politics, and historiography. A good place to learn more about one of the giants of the Confucian tradition.

Knapp, Keith Nathaniel. *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. A good treatment of the concept of filiality and its role in teaching values of harmony and social order in a period that saw changing approaches to core concepts from the *Analects*.

Knoblock, John. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*. Vol. I, Books 1–6. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988. Thoroughly researched and annotated, Knoblock's study of Xunzi's writings is a valuable tool for the reader who has already become acquainted with the Confucian tradition and Xunzi's role within it.

Kuhn, Dieter. *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. A useful

overview of one of the most fascinating periods in Chinese history—when society and economy saw enormous changes, and the intellectual foundations of Confucianism began to be reworked by a series of scholars from Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang to the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Rethinking Intellectual History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1983. A fine collection of essays that speak to thinking historically and the ways in which documents shape the way that we think about life in the past.

LaFleur, Robert André, ed. *China: Asia in Focus*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010. With chapters written by experts in Chinese history, politics, economics, literature, language, art, music, and more, this textbook is written for ambitious general readers who wish to understand how specialized research can be brought to bear upon a general introduction to Chinese life.

Lau, D. C., trans. *Mencius*. London: Penguin Books, 1970. Fewer translations of the *Mencius* are available than for Confucius's *Analects*. Lau's work remains a standard.

Lee, Peter H., ed. *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization, Vol. 2: From the Seventh Century to the Modern Period*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. In the best tradition of the Columbia sourcebooks, Peter Lee's collection of historical documents from Korean history provide a wonderful treatment of a fascinating civilization that, while influenced profoundly by Confucian thought, developed in its own ways, as well.

Legge, James, trans. *Confucian Analects; The Great Learning; The Doctrine of the Mean; The Works of Mencius*. Vols. 1 & 2 of *The Chinese Classics*. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994.

———, trans. *The Shoo King*. Vol. 3 of *The Chinese Classics*. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1993–95.

———, trans. *The She King*. Vol. 4 of *The Chinese Classics*. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991.

———, trans. *The Ch'un Ts'ew with The Tso Chuen*. Vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics*. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991. James Legge's translations of the Chinese classics have been as influential as any in the Western tradition. Although dated in many ways, no one has attempted anything as comprehensive as translating a full array of classical texts. For those interested in historical perspectives, Legge's translations are invaluable; they shaped English translations for many decades and continue to influence them even today.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*. Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967.

———. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Rev. ed. Translated by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham, ed. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969. Claude Lévi-Strauss's elaborate study of kinship contains a gemlike early chapter dealing with reciprocity in which (building upon the work of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Granet, and Marcel Mauss) he describes how pouring wine for one another in a French restaurant creates a special kind of social dynamic.

Luo, Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*. Translated with an afterword and notes by Moss Roberts. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. A comprehensive translation of one of the great novels of the Chinese tradition. This novel contains the story of Matron Xu and her son, who was drawn to be with her out of misplaced feelings about filial conduct.

Magee, Bryan. *Confessions of a Philosopher: A Journey through Western Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1997. One of the best introductions to thinking philosophically (and thinking about philosophy) for general readers, Magee describes in a rich personal narrative how some of the great thinkers of the Western tradition were thoroughly engaged with the big questions about life and thought. He complains memorably that the profession of philosophy has become just a fragment of those big thoughts, and he argues for a return to a rich kind of philosophical inquiry.

Major, John S. *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. A fine, scholarly study of a major text from China's long-lived second dynasty, the

Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). In the *Huainanzi*, among other texts of the period, we can see the development of correlative cosmology and the five phases principles that helped to fuel a new kind of Imperial Confucianism.

Makeham, John. *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003. Although written for specialists, this book is accessible to the reader who has learned about the core principles of Confucian thought (as taught in these lectures). Makeham analyzes four key commentaries and provides a thorough treatment of the important role of the commentarial tradition in Confucian studies.

Mann, Susan, and Yu-Yin Cheng, eds. *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. An invaluable collection of essays, *Under Confucian Eyes* opens a necessary set of discussions about gender in a Confucian tradition that is deeply relevant to changing perspectives on Confucian thought today.

McPhee, John. *The John McPhee Reader*. Edited by William L. Howarth. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991. William Howarth's introduction to John McPhee's working techniques is an exhilarating treatment of a literary master at work. McPhee's approach to reporting provides a valuable perspective on how one must continue to learn in a Confucian ritual tradition.

Mead, George Herbert. *The Individual and the Social Self: Unpublished Work of George Herbert Mead*. Edited with an introduction by David L. Miller. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

———. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Edited by Charles W. Morris. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1967. Among 20th-century social thinkers, few are more valuable in a serious study of interrelational dynamics and social life than George Herbert Mead. A side-by-side reading of Mead and Confucius is one of the most fascinating exercises a serious reader can undertake.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Mills's work forcefully articulates an all-in approach to serious social inquiry that parallels the approach of Confucius in the *Analects*. The work remains, more than half a century after its original publication in 1959, one of the best examples of living one's study rather than just engaging in a course of study.

Miyazaki Ichisada. *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*. Translated by Conrad Schirokauer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981. A delightful (and more than occasionally disturbing) study of the path to examination success and failure in the late imperial period in China.

Mote, Frederick W. *Intellectual Foundations of China*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989. One of the best brief introductions to Chinese thought, written by one of the major figures in Chinese studies of his era.

Neville, Robert Cummings. *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. *Boston Confucianism* presents Confucianism as a living tradition that has taken root in places very far from China, and it speaks to the relevance of Confucian teachings in a thoroughly modern (even postmodern) world.

Nosco, Peter, ed. *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. A fine scholarly study of the influence of Neo-Confucian thought during a time of enormous social, political, and intellectual change in early-modern Japanese history.

Nylan, Michael, and Thomas Wilson. *Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage through the Ages*. New York: Doubleday, 2010. A well-written approach to the many "Confucius" figures that appeared (and disappeared, and appeared again, in different guises) throughout Chinese history.

Oldstone-Moore, Jennifer. *Confucianism: Origins, Beliefs, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Places*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. A brief introduction to Confucianism written by a scholar of religious studies who gives a perspective

often lacking in short overviews that focus on the intellectual tradition in Confucianism.

Paramore, Kiri. *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. A much needed and accessible study of the role of Confucianism in Japanese history.

Plaks, Andrew, trans. *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung (The Highest Order of Cultivation and On the Practice of the Mean)*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. A serious engagement with the less commonly read books, at least among Westerners, of the Four Books tradition.

Sima Qian. *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*. Rev. ed. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: A Renditions--Columbia University Press Book, 1993. See below.

———. *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynastry I*. Rev. ed. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: A Renditions--Columbia University Press Book, 1993. Burton Watson's translations of Sima Qian's classic have been accessible for readers of English for half a century. They form a very good introduction to a text that has been revered for two millennia.

Rainey, Lee Dian. *Confucius and Confucianism: The Essentials*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. A brief and useful overview of Confucius, the *Analects*, and the Confucian tradition that followed.

Reid, T. R. *Confucius Lives Next Door: What Living in the East Teaches Us About Living in the West*. New York: Vintage, 2009. Written for a general audience, Reid's book speaks to the ubiquity of Confucian ways, even in everyday life in the 21st century.

Rolston, David L., ed. *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990. A translation of the prefatory material in six great novels of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, Rolston's translation gives insights into how Chinese critics in the late imperial age reflected on Chinese literature.

Rosemont, Henry, Jr., and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009. An up-to-date translation of a text that formed a foundation for learning Confucian principle for many generations of readers. Rosemont and Ames take pains to explain the context of the work and go into depth about the terms that dominate it.

Sahlins, Marshall. *Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2015. A lively and somewhat acerbic pamphlet by one of the world's most distinguished anthropologists.

Schaberg, David. *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001. One of the finest studies of early Chinese historiography, Schaberg's book gives full rhetorical context to the works, such as the *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*), associated with Confucius's era and later centuries up to the imperial integration of China in 221 B.C.E.

Schuman, Michael. *Confucius and the World He Created*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. Written for a general audience, Schuman conveys significant themes in Confucian thought from a thorough reading of the secondary scholarship. A very good introduction to Confucius and Confucian tradition.

Schwartz, Benjamin I. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985. An impressive study of the many strains of thought that dominated during Confucius's time and in later centuries before the imperial integration. A must-read for people who want to go into depth about the intellectual world of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.

Singer, Dorothy G., and Tracey A. Revenson. *A Piaget Primer: How a Child Thinks*. Rev. ed. New York: Plume, 1996. A brief and useful introduction to the work of one of the 20th century's most innovative developmental psychologists.

Smith, Richard J. *China's Cultural Heritage: The Qing Dynasty, 1644–1912*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. One of the best single-volume treatments of Chinese cultural practices, from literary style and numerology to yin-yang five-phase symbolism and ritual practices.

Spence, Jonathan D. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990. Written by one of the most skillful historical prose stylists, *The Search for Modern China* is a comprehensive narrative of modern China from the early seventeenth century into the twenty-first century.

Sun, Anna. *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. Written by a trained sociologist, *Confucianism as a World Religion* shows the manner in which Western thinkers promoted Confucianism as a doctrine that could be held up to comparative study with other major world religions. The author shows the positives and great negatives associated with this interpretive movement.

Tiwald, Justin and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2014. A useful collection of some of the major thinkers of the imperial era.

Tu Wei-ming. *Centrality and Community: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. Tu Wei-ming's many works show that Confucian thought and practice have a role in contemporary culture—in China and well beyond its borders.

Van Norden, Bryan W., ed. *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. A lively collection of essays that address the role that Confucius and the *Analects* play in a new era.

Waley, Arthur, trans. *The Book of Songs*. Edited with additional translations by Joseph R. Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1996. One of the many (and diverse) translations of Chinese literature from Arthur Waley, his *Book of Songs* translation remains in print and introduces a text that Confucius valued deeply.

———. *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982. A succinct and entertaining introduction to the thought of Confucians (through the lens of Mencius), the Daoists (through the lens of Zhuangzi), and several Legalist thinkers.

Watson, Burton, trans. *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

———, trans. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. Watson's translations of various Warring States era thinkers provide a useful cross-section of the competing views at work in a complex period.

———, trans. *The Tso Chuan: Selections from China's Oldest Narrative History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Watson's partial translation of a historiographical classic, the text tells about life at the court of Lu before, during, and after Confucius's life.

McNaughton, William and Li Ying. *Reading & Writing Chinese: Traditional Character Edition*. Revised edition. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing, 1999.

Wright, Arthur, ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960. A classic compilation of an earlier generation's scholarly engagement with the Confucian tradition.

Xu Shen. *Shuowen Jiezi (Etymological Dictionary)*. Taipei: Shuming chuban gongsi, 1990. An early dictionary of the Chinese language, with useful clues to the etymology of key conceptual characters in the *Analects*.

Zhu Xi. *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*. Translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Patricia Buckley Ebrey. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991. A comprehensive introduction and translation of Zhu Xi's masterwork on family ritual (which Zhu built upon an earlier work by Sima Guang).

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